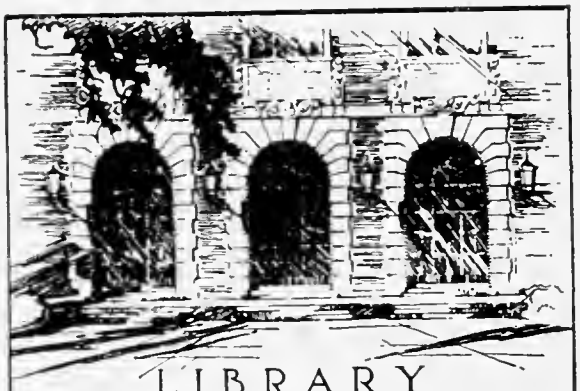

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RESTLESS HUMAN HEARTS.

A Novel.

BY

RICHARD JEFFERIES,

AUTHOR OF 'THE SCARLET SHAWL.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8 CATHERINE ST. STRAND.

1875.

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RESTLESS HUMAN HEARTS.

CHAPTER I.

ALTHOUGH Knoylelands was barely four miles distant, of course Neville found it very different from what it had been in London. He could only see Georgiana at intervals. Pierce welcomed him at Avonbourne, but still he felt that he could not intrude there at the present unfortunate time; so that the only occasions on which he saw Georgie were when she came over to Knoylelands, or when they met by appointment. He missed the ready and easy intercourse of London; there was a void; he could not look forward with certainty to seeing Georgie in the evening, or indeed even in any particular week. He had brought his books and papers with him, and at first he had deluded himself into the belief

that the quiet repose of a country mansion, only inhabited by himself, where he could indulge free of observation in each and every one of his own peculiar little ways and habits, would be favourable to study, and that he should really enjoy it. He found himself strangely mistaken. It was not that it was dull, or that he found its solitude oppressive. What other people called dull had through life been a pleasure to him. He detested excitement, he hated parties, and everything appertaining to what is called amusement. He never went to balls, suppers, dinners; in short, he never went anywhere: fond as he was of music, he never went to a concert.

Essentially Neville was a man who lived in himself; not that he was selfish, but, on the contrary, foolishly generous with his money. Certainly he was polite and well-bred—the reverse of the boorish recluse. He had no feeling of contempt or dislike for any other person; he even sometimes began to wonder if it was not he himself that was worthy of contempt for this very love of solitude. The truth was, that he lived in dreams;

his mind was constantly occupied in weaving visions, if that can be understood. They were not always mere fancies or imaginings; they were frequently hard calculations, abstract reasonings in mathematics, though often enough purely and simply dreams, in which he constructed a state of things sublimated, as it were, from the actual realities of life. In his own mind he had created an ideal world, and peopled it with innumerable beings, which were tangible enough to him; and amongst these he dwelt. The approach of other persons distracted these mental fabrics—they fell down and were destroyed before the jar of a coming footstep. It was like looking at one's face in a basin of water. So long as there is perfect stillness—a complete absence of volition—the surface of the mobile liquid acts as a reflector, and mirrors every feature with distinctness; but the slightest jar or shake, the trembling of the floor caused by a heavy footfall, disturbs it, ruffles the water with miniature waves, and the image is a blurred and shapeless distortion. It required the most perfect repose, a total

immunity from the most minute irritation, to enable the mind—that extremely subtle and mobile thing—so to settle and become smooth, as to reflect upon its surface, clear to his internal sight, the image of those thoughts and dreams which arose in his soul. The very tiniest motion, the smallest sound, the very faintest disturbance, immediately upset the fragile and delicately-balanced mirror, and the image was in a moment a broken and disfigured mass.

Neville had grown to enjoy the utmost pleasure in the perfection of this ethereal picture-painting. It was a species of mental opium-eating. The noise of a fashionable party, the incessant excitement, the constant succession of fresh faces, the utter absence of anything approaching to repose, irritated his nerves, and he could not settle down to his own internal amusement. They were constantly tearing his web as fast as he wove it, destroying its contour, and blotting its beautiful colours. Solitude was to him only another world, filled with creatures and with shapes as far superior to the realities of life

as the mind is to the matter which supports it. He welcomed the quiet and complete retirement of Knoylelands, as a place where he could indulge to the very utmost, and without the least dread of interruption, in this lotos-eating. He dignified it to himself by the name of 'study.' For a few days all went as he expected; the very driving of the rain against the window, and the rise and fall of the wind as it howled around the house, produced a somnolent complacency, particularly favourable to that species of reverie in which he delighted to indulge. After a day or two he grew a little restless; in a week he did nothing but walk up and down, and venture out of doors till the ceaseless rain drove him in. It was not the solitude nor the dulness that made him thus; it was the want of Georgie. Previously he had not recognised what a large portion of the quiet enjoyment he had hitherto felt in life had arisen from the constant intercourse he had had with her. She had become necessary to him; without her he could settle down to nothing—not even to dream. When Georgie did at last

come and stay with him a few hours, he made use of the opportunity to persuade her, with all his powers, to join their fates and hands at once, for he said that then they could be always together; and he explained to her how impossible it was to him to study, or to feel any pleasure in his old pursuits, without her presence. She could not but feel an amount of pleasure in this eager desire for her society, yet it terribly embarrassed her. She had not yet perfected her plan, nor had she yet gathered sufficient courage to communicate it to him, incomplete as it was. Neville saw her depart without having succeeded in moving her one jot, and saw himself again reduced to the companionship of his books, from between whose covers the soul that used to rise up to meet his glance had fled, leaving nothing but cold dry letters, whose meaning he could not grasp.

Have you never written an address upon an envelope, while at the same time thinking of something else, and then trying to read it, found it for a moment meaningless? The letters convey no idea, not even the idea of

a certain sound—they are black splotches—nothing more. The printed lines of his books were thus to Neville. Suddenly it struck him that he would ask Noel down; Noel would cheer him with his talk, perhaps he would even entice him out with a gun or on horseback. Neville had a certain amount of love for field sports, but it halted at love; it never arrived at action unless some one dragged him into it.

Noel came only too willingly: he should be near Heloise—perhaps he should see her. To him the last fortnight had been positive misery; he had no resources, no books, no favourite studies, no day-dreams to which to fly, when the events of the hour left him to himself. And we have seen that even these resources were of very little avail to studious Neville. His more vigorous brother knew knew not what to do. He wandered about town like a spectre, restless night and day. He began to have foolish ideas of going down into the country near Avonbourne, lodging at one of the roadside inns, and walking daily in sight of Bourne Manor. That would at

least be something to do; this waiting was maddening. Naturally he snatched at Neville's invitation.

As Neville had expected, they were speedily out of doors on horseback together. By chance, or by a mysterious instinct, they rode close by the old manor-house, close to Pierce's garden. Here, too, was Neville's hope. Thus it came about that day after day, by common consent, they passed that way; always talking of the most indifferent matters, each in his heart full of one shape and one well-beloved face. They never called; but of course the proximity of two strange gentlemen could not long remain a secret. It became known at Bourne Manor that not only Neville, but his brother, was staying at Knoylelands, and Pierce of course had already fathomed the attachment existing between Georgiana and Neville. Anxious to pleasure his guest, who had been so kind to Heloise, Pierce, always ready to be hospitable, lost no time in inviting them to visit him,—than which, of course, nothing was more natural. On the two first of these occasions it so chanced that

Heloise was not visible; in truth, she had purposely secluded herself, not from any feeling of shame or humiliation, but because of the secret conscientiousness in her own heart; but on the third Noel saw her. This was early in December, when Pierce asked them to join in a pheasant battue. With one of those singular inconsistencies which mark human nature, Pierce, the protector of the timid creatures in his garden—the humane and the gentle—was passionately fond of field sports, be it hunting, shooting, or fishing. His shooting parties were acknowledged to be the best in the county, the preserves were so well stocked, and the host was so courteous and so thoroughly *en rapport* with his friends. But this year Pierce had issued no general invitations; the cloud that had overshadowed his house forbade anything approaching to a public entertainment. There were only a few old friends asked, and out of deference to Georgiana, Neville and Noel. The first of these disgraced himself for ever. Beyond barking a few ash-poles with his shot, and peppering a dog, poor Neville hit nothing that

he knew of. Yet he handled his gun in true sportsmanlike fashion: he did not point it at his neighbours, or endanger the lives of the beaters. He came of a sporting stock, and the blood would show even in this unbroken descendant; but he hit nothing whatever. Noel, on the contrary, a practised shot, distinguished himself beyond all others. He had had no shooting for some time: soon as he smelt the powder the old instincts rose in him savage and fierce; he forgot Heloise—he forgot all, save the wild delight of destruction, the maddening pleasure in one's own skill. His shooting was superb; the old gamekeeper swore with an oath that he had seen nothing like it since he was a lad. Pierce was delighted. Then, in the evening, when Noel was fêted and made much of as the hero of the day, his latent powers of conversation came out again as they had done when Heloise unlocked his lips. She was then ever listening to him; what he spoke of now he had never alluded to before. Those tales that he had related to her were mere stories of adventure, wild and picturesque, but un-

stained with the blood of others than the beasts of the forest.

Now among men—in the company of those who had shared the brutal sport of the morning, who had dipped their hands with him in the blood of hundreds of innocent and timid creatures, who had thus partaken of 'fetish' with him—*now* the inner nature of the man came out. He told them of his wars, of the horrible deeds of the man-hunters of Western America with whom he had lived and worked; of the slow and patient following of the trail of the doomed Indian, the gradual concentration of the beaters in an ever-narrowing circle, as a vast serpent slowly and silently glides after its prey, and then surrounds it within its gigantic folds.

But why linger on these narratives? It is enough to indicate them, without polluting the page with blood. A fierce light shone in his eyes. Heloise had entered the room with a deadly paleness and trembling limbs. The sense of guilt clung to her like the folds of a wet garment, hampering and destroying her natural grace. The company amongst whom

she mingled were far too highly bred either to treat her with the extreme deference which is the common mode of meeting misfortune, or to ignore her with the idea of putting her at her ease. All that they did was to make her feel that to them she was still the Heloise of the olden time—as welcome, as innocent, and as well beloved. Nevertheless her shyness, her labouring awkwardness did not wear off, for Noel was there. He had barely touched her hand, he had but murmured the simplest words demanded by courtesy, yet he had thrilled her to the innermost heart. She could no longer meet him with the open brow and the ready smile, bold in the innocence of her mind. The first pair in the Garden of Eden, so soon as they felt the consciousness of guilt, hid themselves among the trees and clothed themselves with leaves. In like manner Heloise faltered and recoiled; the firmness, the frank openness of her mind was gone. Even Georgie noticed this, but put it down to the remembrance of the elopement of Louis, and did not therefore wonder at it. Neville too attributed it to the same cause.

But when Noel late in the evening began to talk thus, her embarrassment wore off. The sound of his well-remembered voice, the dear tones that had roused up the echoes of her heart, passed like waves over her soul, and washed away the weeds and choking sand-banks that had begun to raise their heads above the waters. She forgot all but him. She hearkened to him wonderingly. Her lips parted slightly, her cheek faintly flushed, her eyes glittered. Why was it that Heloise, the gentle, the timid, listened thus with rapt attention to these tales of fiercest bloodshed? She never analysed the morality of his deeds. They were *his* deeds. Their cruelty, their brutality did not occur to her; they were glossed over by the eagerness of her mind. She felt as he felt; the danger rose up before her and confronted her, and her mind followed out his plans to escape from it with thrilling interest. It was Noel—not the blood he had shed—that drew her with unutterable interest. If any conception of the character of these deeds did ever pass across her thought, it was only to give rise to a sense of wonder,

of marvelling delight in *his* prowess, his terrible arm, his unerring eye. The glamour of love was over her, and the sound of his voice mingled that night with her feverish dreams.

Pierce himself, carried away by the enthusiasm of the moment—admiring the brilliant shooting of his guest, and gratified by the evident interest of his friends—overlooked the savageness, the inhuman ferocity of these doings in far-off lands, and forgot their true character. Out of Noel's narrative there had sprung anecdotes and touches of observation which had excited Pierce's interest. On the morrow he questioned Noel; and Noel, eager to please Pierce, and so to obtain a footing in the house, bent his mind to recollect what he had seen of nature and nature's ways in the dense jungle of Africa and the primeval woods of the New World. This fascinated Pierce. Ever a student of nature, yet scarcely even having stirred from his own country, Pierce dwelt with intense interest on the discoveries of this bold explorer. Aided by his questions, which suggested long-forgotten facts to his

memory, Noel laid before his host a wealth of new material almost bewildering.

This, and the delight that he showed in the sports of the field, in a few weeks made Noel the almost constant companion of Pierce. Together they strolled over the fields and the breezy downs, with the bitter wind beating in their faces—the old man of seventy winters stepping out in a pardonable vanity, proud of his own still strong vitality. Together they met in the evening smoking and talking, while Heloise by slow degrees grew once more accustomed to his presence, and the fatal ease of intercourse overcame the warnings of her conscience. Neville, only too glad of these opportunities to see Georgie, shut his eyes to what was going on, with the true selfishness of a genuine lover, and Georgie was blinded by his presence.

CHAPTER II.

THERE came a time at last when Georgie, reluctant as she was, was compelled to give an answer to Neville's continual questionings and persuasions. He could not be put off for ever. He was ready to agree to any proposal she liked to make, to consent to anything so that only she would be his. How she told him she never could remember, and Neville was too much amazed to have any distinct recollection of the manner of the communication. But the matter of it was plain and evident enough. It was glaring, startling, something which could not be misunderstood. She wanted him to inaugurate a new era by marrying her for three years, and not for life. As it was impossible to do this legally, she proposed that they should take such steps to make the proceeding perfectly open and in the sight of all, so that the contract—though

it might want the consecration of the priest and the sanction of the State—might nevertheless be a good and true marriage in the eye of the world. This was what she at last conveyed to him, with many circumlocutions and much hesitation and stammering, for she was afraid that this extraordinary proposal would give him cause to suspect her maidenly modesty.

But Neville never thought of that; he was simply overwhelmed with amazement. Then he began to rapidly controvert her ideas, and to show the utter absurdity of her design, besides its thorough opposition to all the received canons of social relationship.

This course at once put Georgie on her mettle, and gave her a full flow of speech. As soon as it came to argument she was at home. Forgetting the personal application of the subject, she treated it as if it had concerned some one afar off and invisible. As to the mere novelty of the thing, that she declared was not the slightest reason against it; and as for the sensation it would cause in society, any rational being was of course quite indifferent to society. What on earth had

this intangible creation of men's minds, this vague and ill-defined cloud called 'society,' to do with her grand mission for the regeneration of her sex? What prophet, what reformer, what great name of the ages past had ever cared for 'society'? Invariably 'society' had been against them—not only in words and remarks, but in hard and cruel deeds. For facing these hard and cruel deeds, these tortures and these flames, these men had been dignified as martyrs, and were admitted to a niche in the world's Pantheon. If they could withstand the fierce and biting fire, the scorching tongues of flame that licked up the glorious human form as if it had been a heap of dried leaves, could not she, in the consciousness of a great cause, face the mere carpet inquisitions, the mere paltry sneers and criticisms of that miserably weak and childish aggregate of effete particles called 'society'? What had he ever seen in her to indicate that she lacked stability of character or firmness of purpose? What she preached that she was determined to practise, and openly before the world. There were thousands and thousands

of her sex who thought the same as she did, but whom the lack of stamina and the force of irresistible circumstances prevented from asserting themselves. She had all these things. She was firm and bold—ready to dare and resolved to bear the consequences. She had an independent fortune, not large, but sufficient for her wants. Not a human being could in any way hamper her proceedings. Of full age, with special powers under her father's will exempting her from any control —of a sound and vigorous mind, entirely unfettered by any prejudice—what better conditions could there be for such an assertion of woman's rights and woman's independence? She did not suggest they should sneak into this contract and hide themselves as if ashamed from the faces of their friends. Here her fair and excited face blushed a little. On the contrary, she wished it to take place openly, and with every accompaniment that could make the contract solemn and in every respect a true marriage. Very well she knew what some people would say—that, try how they might, they could never succeed in legalising

such a marriage; it must still be illegal, or rather unrecognised by the law. But truth was superior to law; right was better than technical routine. Ill-natured people would say that she was a 'mistress'—let them say so. Fully she recognised all these disagreeable, all these cogent objections; and she was determined to override them all. It was her belief that if two persons, man and woman, solemnly met together and pledged their troth in the presence of others, and with just sufficient ceremony to give a tangible reality to it, that man and woman were really and truly man and wife in the sight of Heaven. After all, what were these laws? They were certainly not inscribed on the tables that Moses took from the outstretched hand of Deity. Though undoubtedly in their spirit sanctioned by Heaven, the letter was purely a human invention; and she contended that the time had come when that letter should be altered. By taking this bold initiative, she should in one single step proceed farther on the road than hundreds and thousands of mere talkers could accomplish. The Fact would

preach with irresistible force. It would take root and spread. On what did she ground her adherence to the three-year system of marriage? On the plainest and most straightforward ground—that in that time the parties could ascertain if they were fitted for each other and if their anticipations were realised; and if so, they could then enter upon the contract for life; or if not, it was infinitely better that they should part. It was hardly necessary for her to allude to those painful events which had only recently taken place to illustrate this. As for the old superstition about the sacrament of marriage, and its being a juncture which no earthly power could destroy, she laughed it to scorn. If both the parties were heartily and cordially agreed to live together, and to remain in that condition of life in which they were, then she certainly believed that there *was* no earthly power, no tribunal or authority which could in any way interfere with their right to do so. That right was the very birthright of every human being. In that light, and under such conditions as these, the tie was sacred and could not be

separated. But, on the other hand, when either party found that the other was unsuited, or that their anticipations had not been realised, or that—not to particularise the reasons—there was a desire to part, then she held that no earthly power, tribunal, or authority had the right to compel them to dwell together, or to continue to merge their legal identity. Others—weak women—talked of this, and believed it, and sighed for it. Thousands of them sighed for it, for this reason: it would give such an impetus to marriage. Hundreds and hundreds—countless numbers—of marriages would take place, if there was the certainty that in a reasonable period, if disagreement arose, they could part. As it was, young men were naturally shy of matrimony. Now it was confessedly a lottery: her plan would reduce it to something approaching to rational investment.

Neville, knowing that it would be of no avail to contradict her flatly, or to attempt to draw her away from her conclusions, attacked her in detail. Suppose these parties married in such a system did not both agree in quar-

relling; suppose one wished to be free and the other did not; how meet that contingency? Georgie replied that no person had a right to control another; therefore, in such a case, the person who wished to remain in the married state must give way.

Neville was about to bring up the still more difficult question of possible children, but delicacy forbade him. Georgie seeing him pause, went on to attack him in return. They, Neville and she, were not required to lay down a piece of legislation so framed as to meet every possible emergency that might arise. They had but themselves to deal with; therefore they need not waste their time in discussing how to arrange imaginary alternatives. No such discords would arise between them; they should not disagree. 'Then why not marry in the old way for life?' asked Neville. She quickly replied that it was the principle she stood up for. Nothing could move her from the principle.

And nothing could move her. Neville argued with her till he got angry. Then he left her. This he repeated day after day and

week after week; till it seemed as if the controversy would lengthen into months. But it was in vain. And after a time, by the constant reiteration of her argument, aided by the pertinent remarks that occurred to her, she actually succeeded in making some impression upon Neville. He was obliged to admit her fundamental principles; that was the worst of it; that gave her such force, such a standpoint to make way against him. Accepting, as he had always done, the political theory which centres in the one word 'Liberty,' he could not conscientiously attempt to controvert the premises upon which she built her edifice. So that in time it came to this: he opposed her wishes upon one ground only; and that was that as a man, as her lover, and her husband, he could not endure to hear her conduct spoken of slightingly, or made a subject for sneering criticisms. For himself he did not care; but for her. Out of this she partly argued him, partly laughed him, partly coaxed him. It is just possible that if in the first place he had given way to her, and offered to carry her whim into imme-

diate execution, that before the day came she would have wavered and paused. All this argument, all these discussions and persuasions only acted as a spur to thoroughly rouse up her energies, and to bend them with unflinching determination upon this one end. In the end it was her beauty that carried the day. Neville could not resist her when she resorted to the feminine arts of persuasion. Finally he yielded conditionally, that the 'marriage' should be solemnised with every possible outward show and ceremony that could make it a genuine one in the eyes of the world. He had a lingering hope that when it came to lawyers and settlements, and all the details of the subject, that she would recoil alarmed. Georgie readily assented to this condition; it was indeed her own wish, and part of her original plan. So it was settled between them.

Georgie had, however, yet to stand the fire of those friends, those immediate and intimate friends, to whom the project was disclosed. Pierce in his quiet gentle manner placed before her in striking colours the sin-

gular position in which she would be placed. His calm manner had far more effect upon her than all the ardent language of Neville had done. Heloise pleaded affectionately, begging her dearest friend not to take so dangerous a step. These two alone made any impression upon Georgie. They shook her a little. Her heart beat faster as she thought of them; but though her senses might waver, her mind remained unchanged, firm as before.

This marriage now became the one topic of conversation at Avonbourne. After a while, so much talking, such constant consideration of the aspects of the matter had its natural effect upon them. They grew to look upon it as not so very much out of the way after all; nothing so extremely astonishimg and remarkable. The angularities of the idea wore off, if such a phrase may be used, and the strong points rooted themselves in their minds. It was spoken of as a topic no longer of weight or moment, but just as if it was an ordinary event. This tended to reassure Georgie, and to fill her with spirit to carry out her undertaking. There was but one

now who opposed it. This was Philip, Pierce's brother—the clergyman of the parish—who lived in the adjacent house. Philip ceased not day and night to do whatever he could to discourage this proceeding. He argued against it; he preached against it; he produced authorities against it. Filled with all the traditions of his Church, zealous even to officiousness, he reproved them in one breath, and endeavoured to persuade them in the other. In time they grew to be perfectly indifferent to him. Then in secret he changed his tactics: he said no more, but he resolved to do what he could to make the ceremony as binding as possible. In this matter he had a cordial though unpronounced friend in Neville. Between them they endeavoured so to arrange matters as to give the affair an aspect at least of being sanctioned by authority, even if it was not really so.

There had been a time, when in London, when Heloise had looked forward to her friend's marriage with delight and anticipation. She had talked of the dresses, of the bridesmaids, of the thousand-and-one details which ladies

alone can bear in mind. That was months ago. But now that it was rapidly approaching, and in a most singular and exceptionable manner, Heloise seemed to lose all interest in it. Even Georgie remarked this apparent coldness; and Heloise, hurt at the idea of seeming indifferent to Georgie's fate, endeavoured to rouse herself, and fix her mind upon it. But Noel had been too potent. The very idea of a marriage brought up feelings which would not be controlled. This throbbing of her heart would not be stilled. Ah, Noel, Noel! what mischief he had caused! It was at this time that Philip, the clergyman who had been in private on the watch for these things, produced a copy of a London paper, in which the approaching event was alluded to in plain and not over-flattering terms: 'We hear that a remarkable marriage, which will signalise the commencement of a new era in the annals of matrimony, will be celebrated in the now fast-coming season. This marriage will present the novel and exceptionable peculiarity of being for three years only. As no such marriage is recognised by the law, it follows

of course that the parties to this contract can be under no binding engagement, and will be practically free to leave each other the very next week. Under the specious pretext of forwarding women's rights, this "new sensasation" may captivate the novelty-seeking portion of the public; but those who possess the power of penetrating beneath the surface of things will feel unfeigned regret at a precedent which may be made to let in a flood of corruption.'

Georgiana laughed at all this, except the 'specious pretext.' That stuck by her—it was always before her. It rose up when she was alone—it confronted her, as the mystic writing on the wall confronted the astonished king. 'Specious pretext!' Was it just possible that she was deceiving herself? But she would not admit such a possibility. She shut her ears, determined not to hear. And the preparations went forward, and grew near completion.

CHAPTER III.

This was how the formalities were arranged. The lawyers had been busy at them for some time, and many were the consultations before all parties were agreed. Out of the chaos of numberless suggestions an order was at length evolved. Georgiana's property consisted of the estate at Knoylelands, covering about eight hundred acres, and a very fine dwelling-house, lawns, and gardens. This was entirely her own; she could devise it by will to whomsoever she chose. Neville Brandon's sole estate was 20,000*l.* in Consols. It had originally been double that amount; but he had never paid the least attention to his monetary affairs, either to obtain a better interest, or to retain what he possessed. He had spent fully one-half of his fortune in his travels, and in prosecuting scientific researches at a great

cost. As the law could not be twisted in any way so as to sanction the marriage of these two for a limited number of years, they searched about for a way to bind them together by other means. Indirectly this could be accomplished through their respective properties. In other words, Georgiana Knoyle on the one part, and Neville Brandon on the other part, entered into partnership as a firm, and executed the proper deeds, and were duly registered and gazetted as such. The partnership was nominally to work and farm Georgiana's estate of eight hundred acres. She found the land, he found the capital; and thus the partnership became a real and genuine one. Such an engagement as this could be broken off at any time by consent; or if one objected, could be severed by his or her discharging all claims that the other had upon them. In this way there was a real, tangible, and substantial bond between Georgiana and Neville, entirely independent of and superior to any mere declaration they might make.

This bond was so far better and more in accordance with the fundamental principles of

justice than the legal effect of an ordinary marriage, that it was perfectly just to both parties. To provide for the possible advent of children, Neville executed a deed binding himself to allow a stated sum per annum towards the maintenance and education of the same, be they male or female. Up to ten years of age both sexes were to remain with the mother; after that the girls were to become, as it were, the absolute property of the mother and the boys of the father, who were each to be respectively responsible.

To meet the contingency of either party dying Georgiana also executed a deed (which she could do, as, not being legally married, she did not incur legal disabilities), leaving a proportion of her property to trustees for the education and maintenance of children. Neville did the same. So that in fact the money for the maintenance of children was in reality placed in the hands of trustees. Over and above this, it was, of course, competent to either party to devise their estates to any or all of the possible heirs; but the above arrangement was adopted as one pro-

tecting either party against any breach of faith by the other.

In the event of there being no heirs at the expiration of the three years, or within one year from that separation, these deeds were to become null and void. It was then open to either party either to renew them or to let them drop. The partnership could be dissolved at any time; but these other deeds held good for three years and the year of grace, which year of grace was provided in order to meet a possible contingency which will suggest itself to the reader.

Practically this partnership and these provisions for possible heirs were the only real bonds that all the ingenuity they exercised could devise. There remained only the ceremony. The lawyers rather pooh-poohed this part of the matter. It was quite superfluous, quite useless, and of no effect. They might just as well go at once and reside together; there was no other step they could take that would be of the least practical good.

Georgiana and Neville both thought very differently. As far as possible they were

determined to satisfy that traditionary requirement of society which demands that in all these great events of life there shall be a certain amount of ceremony — an outward show to exhibit the inner sentiments. Antiquarians may say that this is a remnant of the times when there were no records, when the art of writing was in a bald and imperfect state. To preserve the memory of an event as much ceremony as possible was gone through, and as great a crowd of persons collected together, so that there might be many witnesses, and that the fact might be widely spread and published. In fact such a gathering answered exactly the same purpose as the modern announcement in the newspapers.

The solicitors rather satirically remarked, for they neither altogether relished these irregular proceedings, that if one thing was done away with they might as well do away with all. If they could do without the sanction of the Legislature and without the sanction of the Church, why be so anxious to secure the approbation of the public? They might

just as well sign the deeds, drive to the railway, take their tickets, and start off to Paris for the honeymoon at once.

But Neville's idea was that more than a mere traditionary prejudice existed under the popular faith in a certain amount of publicity and ceremony at these important events of life. His idea was that these ceremonies were the tangible outward signs, the manifestations of the internal and unseen thought.

They, he and Georgie, might each sit apart in different rooms and think over all those obligations towards each other which they were about to incur; and having so thought rise up and meet and go forth together into the world. But there was no responsibility about this; no other person was made acquainted with what their promises towards each other were. No one could be a witness to the fact that they had made such promises. The ceremony might in itself be a very ridiculous thing, considered *per se* and in the abstract, but it was a public declaration of responsibility. The law had in all times prescribed that no inten-

tion was complete till some act, often very trifling in itself, had been gone through; deeds for instance had to be completed, signed and sealed, before they had a legal force. The mere act of affixing a paltry piece of sticking substance to a sheet of parchment was in itself absurd; but it was an outward act or sign of the intention of the man. Therefore both he and Georgiana were resolved that there should be some amount of ceremony and some amount of publicity.

By this time Neville had grown thoroughly interested in the matter. Having once given his consent he threw his mind ardently into it. Since they were to do this thing they might as well do it in such a fashion as to set an example to all time, and to furnish a precedent which others might follow. Together with Georgiana he set to work to compose a new marriage service, adapted to the thought of modern days, and in accordance with the theory that man and woman were socially equal. It was in fact a draft of a new marriage service which future legislators might take as a model, and which they could alter

or improve upon—filling up the first imperfect outline with the lights and shadows of experience.

First they agreed that the law ought to be altered so as to give greater facilities to marriage. The document they drew up ran as follows, and was afterwards to be published in the form of a pamphlet:

'The increasing population of these isles, and the varying phases of public thought, demand that the social contract of marriage should be greatly modified and simplified; and the spread of education of late years has been so great, that many of the cumbrous instruments which were necessary in an age of ignorance, and of slow communication, may safely be removed. At present it is not considered that the age at which marriage can be contracted by the simple will of the parties concerned should be reduced below the age of twenty-one years, as to do so would so largely interfere with the existing laws respecting property. But it is to be hoped that in the future these laws will be so modified as to allow of marriages under that

age without the necessity of obtaining any consent, and at least as early as eighteen, since the aforesaid higher education of this age must be held to make persons responsible agents much sooner than formerly, and therefore to entitle them to an earlier immunity from control.

'In these times, when almost every person can read, and when the day is rapidly approaching when the "almost" of this sentence may be omitted with truth, it behoves the legislature of the country to acknowledge this altered condition of affairs. Every person is now aware, from the information disseminated by the public press, that persons committing bigamy or marrying within the prescribed degrees, are either liable to severe punishment or the contract is null and void. Those requirements which were necessary in bygone times to prevent the recurrence of these offences are therefore now superfluous. Such are the publication of banns—with the power of forbidding the same, and so stopping a marriage—and the statutes requiring residence in the parish over a given period. This latter

is especially onerous and utterly opposed to the spirit and social life of a period in which such vast multitudes of people are compulsorily engaged in travelling; and also when the easy and rapid means of communication permits engagements to be entered into at the distance of several hundreds of miles from home.

'With reference to the prevention of the crime of bigamy or the marrying within the prohibited degrees, since all persons may now fairly be held to understand that such practices are reprehensible, there can be no need of any enactments permitting other persons to step in and interfere. If they choose to declare that there is no affinity and to incur the penalty, they do so with their eyes open and wittingly; and on this ground there can be no claim to retain these cumbrous processes.

'The power given to persons to stop the publication of banns, and thus to hinder, if not to prevent, the solemnisation of matrimony, is invidious to the liberty of the subject and opposed to the spirit of modern society. It is simply and solely a remnant of

that period when the feudal laws were in full force, when the lord could interfere with almost every step taken by his vassal; and it seeks to confer upon parents and trustees powers similar to these. If it practically fails in this respect, it does practically result in a great hindrance and loss of time. Therefore both the publication of banns and the residence for a given number of days in the parish ought to be done away with.

'There is indeed no reason, apart from the dogmatical prejudice handed down from generation to generation, why marriage should not be as easy and as expeditious as the mere handing of a cheque for a sum of money to another and the cashing of the same, or of any other banking process.

'The only canons that remain to be satisfied are these (granted of course that both parties freely consent): First, there should be a certain amount of publicity after the act. Secondly, that there should be some duly authorised person to perform the ceremony. Thirdly, that there should be a registration by the State. The last two of these canons

cannot be satisfied in our case; let us trust that they will be in the future.

'The principle of the proceeding having been thus cleared of incumbrances and narrowed down to its true proportions, there only remain the technical formalities to be laid down. To arrive at these it is necessary to amplify the bare canons alluded to above. The authorised persons should be magistrates, lawyers, physicians, clergymen; and, in short, all persons who hold a recognised position, and diplomas proving that they possess a higher education than the mass of people. They should be empowered to solemnise marriage at any place and any hour, and should be required by Act of Parliament (magistrates particularly) to do so between the hours of eight in the morning and twelve at noon, *without any previous notice whatever*. Other hours should be matters of arrangement. For such solemnisation they should demand the sum of one shilling and one shilling only; and this not as a matter of remuneration, but as a recognition of the fact that a certain work has been done and an act committed.

'In addition to the above authorised persons, the registrars of births, deaths, and marriages, now appointed by Government, should also have the same power. All marriages must be notified to the registrar at his office within four-and-twenty hours after the event, and a fee of one shilling must be paid for registration. The neglect to make this notification should be punishable. The registrar should be required, by virtue of his office, to insert a notice of the marriage in the next issue of one local paper; and every local paper throughout the kingdom should be compelled to insert such notice for the sum of one shilling: this shilling must be paid by the parties to the registrar. The whole amount of the fees, therefore, should be three shillings, and neither more nor less. The form of announcement in the newspapers to be as follows:

"REGISTRAR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

"*June* 11. By R. E. D. Powell, Esq., J.P., at his residence, Emily, daughter of Jas. Farnell, aged nineteen, of Bideford, county Devon,

to John Frampton, aged twenty-two, of Bristol, for three years.

"*June* 12. By S. C. Charles, M.D., F.R.C.S., at his surgery, Eliza, daughter of &c. &c., for seven years.

"Published by authority of

"WILLIAM THOMPSON, *Registrar*."

'The ceremony to be performed before the authorised person should be of the simplest and shortest description. Standing before the magistrate, one on either hand, the man should be first sworn upon the Testament, to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, in the usual manner. The woman should likewise be sworn. By these means, all the old checks upon bigamy and illegal contracts will be superseded, since, after this oath, either party would become liable to a prosecution for perjury, if they wrongfully answer the questions then to be put by the magistrate.

'*Magistrate* (to the man). What is your full and correct name, your parish, your county, and your age?

'*The Man.* My name is John Frampton, of the parish of St. Mary Redcliffe, Bristol, in the county of Bristol, and my age is twenty-two.

'*Magistrate* (to the woman). [The same question and the same answer.]

'*Magistrate* (to the man). Is this woman related to you in any of the prohibited degrees, or is there any other legal impediment to your marriage? [At the same time handing to him a printed card with the prohibited degrees and legal impediments plainly displayed.]

'The same question should then be put to the woman, and if their answers are in the negative the magistrate then presiding should say:

'*Magistrate.* For what period are you mutually desirous of being joined together in marriage?

'Having received their answers, say for three years—

'*Magistrate* (to the man). Repeat these words after me: I, John Frampton, am desirous of entering into the state of marriage

with thee, Emily Farnell [placing his hand in the woman's], for the period of three years.

'Altered so as to suit the feminine gender, the same sentence should be repeated by the woman. The magistrate should then direct the man to take the ring and to repeat after him as follows:

'I take thee, Emily Farnell, to be my wife for the space of three years; and I place this ring upon thy finger in token that I accept all the responsibilities which the law of this realm places upon me for so doing.

'Then the woman shall say after the magistrate:

'I take thee, John Frampton, to be my husband for the space of three years; and I permit thee to place the ring upon my finger in token that I also accept all the legal responsibilities of that position.

'They should then both write their names in a book provided to all magistrates and professional persons for that purpose, and the magistrate afterwards should say, after receiving the shilling fee:

'As the representative of the Queen's ma-

jesty upon this occasion, I pronounce ye man and wife for the period of three years.

'This should conclude the ceremony; and it would then only remain for the magistrate to communicate with the registrar, by tearing off the duplicate form from his book, properly filled up to correspond with the half he retains, and which should pass through the post free as a government document. Of course any magistrate or any person marrying parties either of whom should be drunk or incapacitated from understanding what was going forward should be liable to heavy punishment; and any drunken person demanding marriage should be also liable to a severe penalty; as also persons attempting to occasion the marriage of an incapable or insane individual. The above is the outline of what we consider to be the only rational method of marriage, and as such suited to the requirements of our day. Therefore, so far as lies in our power, we are about to carry these principles into effect. In our case, being the first of the kind, we propose to sign an additional document, making a formal statement of our opinions,

but this is not intended to form a precedent. It should be added to the above, that in the case of persons, at the expiration of three years or any other term for which they have been married, wishing to renew the contract, this should be done by a simple repetition of the ceremony, with the addition of the words "renewal for such and such years" in the sentences repeated by the man and woman, and also in the registrar's announcement in the newspapers. It would also be desirable that three witnesses should be present—one for the magistrate, another for the man, and a third for the woman—each of whom should sign the certificate of marriage in the magistrate's book.'

This was the pamphlet they together composed and subsequently published.

CHAPTER IV.

At Pierce's own particular desire the marriage was to take place at Bourne Manor. It was of course impossible to hold it in any church; the ceremony, such as it was, must be gone through in a private house. It was hardly the thing to hold it in the bride's own residence at Knoylelands, and they did not care to return to London. There was no desire to shun the publicity that must ensue, but they did not wish a crowd of lookers-on; the actual fact must be accomplished as quietly as possible, whatever noise might ultimately follow. When the day drew near, Philip, the clergyman, left them entirely, and came no longer to the place. He shunned it as accursed, and would not run the remotest risk of having it said that he sanctioned the unholy alliance by his presence. There was some relief in his absence. However convinced

they might feel in their own minds that they were doing no wrong, but rather inaugurating a desirable state of things, yet it was not pleasant to have a man perpetually at your elbow labouring to upset your views. Besides which there was a certain amount of traditionary respect, a halo of indefinite reverence, surrounding the representative of the Church, and this caused just the faintest sense of guilt, as if they were engaged in desecration. So that they were cordially glad that he kept at a distance.

Heloise could not refrain from reflection on the coming event. Till now, whatever had been her passive guilt in loving Noel, she had at least not taken so decided a moral step as to desire separation from Louis. But this three years' system, this marriage for a limited period, could not fail to arouse reflection. It reacted upon her. She could not help wishing that her marriage with Louis had been contracted on similar principles, so that she might, after a little waiting, be free again. There was nothing in this unnatural, and it is difficult to blame her, yet it was the

first decided step she took on the downward road. It was the beginning of the eager desire which soon after rose in her mind to be completely and for ever separated from all bonds and connection with Louis, who, whatever he might be, was still her wedded husband, whom she had sworn to adhere to till death. Such a desire could not fail to let in other thoughts as actively mischievous as this was passive. Those who with Philip will look upon this social marriage of Neville's with horror may trace in this its effect upon Heloise a confirmation of their dislike. From this feeling Heloise grew to be excitedly anxious about the success of the design. How supine and indifferent she had hitherto been we have seen. Now she became deeply interested, and spent her time entirely with Georgie, giving those delicate little attentions which none but a woman, and that woman a loving admiring friend, could give. Out of this evident interest grew up another effect upon Georgie, who, thus strengthened and supported, eased the tension of her mind, and prepared for the event as if it was of ordinary

importance only. Noel held no share in the deliberations of those preliminary days. In his heart of hearts he rather despised this *dilettante* method of procedure. If his brother and his lady really believed and felt what they alleged, why could not they quietly go off arm-in-arm, take the first train, and say no more about it?

If a man really loved, he would not care for marriage on lease, with option of renewal. He would wish to possess the object of his affection for ever, and through all the phases which existence may possibly assume after death. He would not hesitate, nor she either, to consider whether they were legally independent, or to take into consideration cobwebs of moral rights and wrongs. Such ideas never occurred to him with regard to Heloise. But he gave not the slightest sign of these his real sentiments. The greater the fuss and the more it was necessary for Neville to be at Bourne Manor, the better it was for Noel. It gave him almost daily chances of seeing Heloise. Literally seeing, for it was rarely that he got an opportunity to exchange a word

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with her. She avoided him, not openly, but with all the tact of her nature. She rejoiced to *feel* that he was in the house with her—that he was near—and yet hid herself with her love from his view. The pretext of constant attendance on Georgie afforded her ample means of concealing herself. These two were now constantly together. Georgie, with all her strong nature, her rather masculine mind and firmness, clung to the fragile creature now much as Heloise had clung to her in the commencement of their friendship. Love Neville as she might, and know him and his disposition ever so well, still there was an uncertainty in the prospect of continual life with him. Even to those who are about to enter matrimony on the old and approved terms, with the sympathy of every one or at least the disapproval of none, there is to the sensitive girl or more thoughtful woman a degree of hesitation and uncertainty; and we know that the mind fears the unknown dangers far more than those which are familiar.

Georgie had none of the moral support obtained from ancient usage and the strong feel-

ings of society; she was not only about to enter an entirely new social relation, but she was flinging herself boldly in the very face of the world, possibly to be reviled and spit at; at any rate to be the object of criticism. Naturally, therefore, she clung to Heloise—to *woman's* society—much as the sailors who accompanied Columbus must have strained their eyes upon those native shores from which they were speeding into the great Unknown. For henceforth how many women would acknowledge her? In their secret hearts they might applaud her, and be glad that she had broken the spell that hung over the sex, confining them to the feudal usages of a bygone time; much as the spells of the magicians in the fairy tale bound the princess in sleep for a hundred years, still clothed, when awakened, in the curious and gorgeous garments long since discontinued. But outwardly would they not sneer and carp and cavil and 'run her down,' as the phrase is, to the full extent of their nimble and bitter tongues, holding up their hand in utter failure even to comprehend that extraordinary creature who had

thus— It was too painful a subject, really! Georgie had her misgivings that from the day she marked herself out in this way the doors of society would be shut to her. It was all very well in her enthusiastic moods to declare, as she had done to Neville again and again, that she rose superior to the breath of depreciation and detraction—far above the prejudices of society. And so she did rise above those prejudices. But it was not in human nature, however firmly moulded, to utterly divorce itself from all fellow-feeling and want of sympathy from its kind. Especially is this hard to a woman, taught from her youth up to revere the usages of society as much or more than the precepts of the Church. Georgie, like Heloise, having lost her mother early, had not had all the advantages or disadvantages of this training; but she had had enough to leave an impression on her mind. Heloise was a great comfort to her in these days.

The old house at Avonbourne contained a really fine hall. It had been built when the hall was a part of the daily life of the men and women of those times; when the various

ranks of society there met and took their positions openly. There was the dais or lord's seat—the raised platform upon which the lord of the place, with his chosen friends and equals, sat—at the head of the board overlooking the long range of tables. There was the huge fireplace, high enough for a man to ride under on horseback, almost dark and cavernous enough for him and horse to disappear within. Over this there was a carving of a shield, with the arms of an ancient knight, surrounded with oak-leaves cut in the stone, and beneath it the motto in dog Latin, 'Strike not but to destroy;' meaning that a blow should not be given unless it entirely disabled the opponent. The enemy should never be irritated and roused to greater vigour with feeble hits and weak thrusts, the only effect of which was to fill him with contempt. Wait till renewed strength and golden opportunity combined, then deliver one fatal overwhelming blow, and crush him never to rise again. For fully sixty feet this rare old hall extended, and rather more than twenty in breadth, panelled with black oak. The roof rose on an

arch, as if one stood under the keel of an overturned ship, upheld on huge beams and polished rafters. There was one large window at the western end, where there was a courtyard, but all the length of the hall was only lighted from narrow arrow-slits. The western extremity, overlooking a courtyard, was safe from assaults, but the side wall was an outside wall, hence the narrow windows. This western window, large and mullioned—larger than would otherwise have been required in order to give as much light as possible—was full of stained glass in its lower panes. There was the rose of the Tudors, and the arms of many a knight and abbot. The panes above these were green, and some nearly yellow with age. So that this vast and lofty hall was full of a subdued light, a misty radiance, an intangible cloud, which hovered in the corner, but fled at one's approach and took refuge in the recesses of the roof. The eastern end, where the dais was, rising about two steps above the level of the floor, was thus always in a twilight, not dim enough in any way to obscure the view, but sufficient to soften down

the angles and reduce the colour. The floor had originally been paved with stone, but Pierce had this removed, many slabs being worn into holes, and the damp rising through the joints. He laid down a solid foundation of concrete impervious to damp, and on this a mosaic, a facsimile of the pavement of an ancient chapel he had seen; the lion of the Bigods—or griffin may it be called?—figuring upon each tile. This mosaic was not slippery. It was glazed, but not highly so. It did not shine. Pierce's taste objected to both these things — slipperiness and a shining surface. They might do for an Alhambra, but not for such a hall as this.

Long since the walls of this mighty chamber had been hung with lance and axe, matchlock and pike, shield and sword, with a dusty moth-eaten banner beneath each arrow-slit. There they still hung untouched, frowning upon those who passed, each instinct with its tale of the turbulent old times. Swords were there still, notched at the edge; axes splotched with great brown stains; the chronicles of fierce strugglings—man with man. These very

weapons, and the sense of rude savageness which they called forth, brought out into still greater contrast the picture which hung upon the eastern wall, high over the dais. It was a very large painting, so that the artist could represent his figures of fully actual size, adapted to be hung at a height, and seen from some little distance. The tarnished gilding of the heavy frame spoke of vanished time. It was indeed by an old master—it matters not by whom—a master who has left few evidences of his power, but those enough to bear witness to his transcendent genius. It was a painting of Christ. His was the only human figure in it. Not the dead Christ tenderly lifted down with loving hands from the cruel cross, instinct as it were with death. Not the Christ sitting at the table with the disciples, with John leaning on his bosom hearkening to the mysteries. Nor the injured, the insulted, yet divine Being quitting the Prætorium. This was the Nazarene as He might be met upon the road, passing on foot unnoticed from one village to another; alone, communing with his thoughts. The only accessories were the

palm-tree, and a few ears of wheat indicating a corn-field. Else there was nothing but the dusty sandy track, with the print of his footsteps behind—'footprints,' indeed, 'upon the sands of Time'—nothing but the common road and Him. He was in no agony, no distortion; simply walking slowly, thoughtfully, just as you might have met Him, just as the wayfarers met Him in those wonderful days. But the Divinity shone out and irradiated the very road, throwing upon it a mystic and beautiful light, as the autumn moon would transform the white track to a thing of exquisite beauty. The painter had portrayed Him after the famous Letter of Lentulus, a description which, however the critics may dispute it, the heart at once accepts and the soul ratifies as the only possible human impersonation of Deity. 'He was a man of lofty stature, of serious and imposing countenance, inspiring love as well as fear in those who beheld Him. His hair was the colour of wine, straight and without lustre as far as the ears, but thence glossy and curly, flowing upon the shoulders and divided down the

centre of the head, after the manner of the Nazarenes. The forehead was smooth and serene, the face without blemish, of a pleasant, slightly ruddy colour. The expression noble and engaging. The nose and mouth of perfect form. The beard abundant and of the same colour as the hair, parted in the middle. The eyes blue and brilliant. He is the most beautiful among the children of men.' Out of this bald and meagre outline the painter had evolved the animation of the original, giving it a life and a lustre beyond all words.

This was no mere mechanical carpenter, a man who sawed wood and yawned over it; this was an immortal, a god, a divine being. The man could not conceal the divinity; the flesh could not hide the immortal majesty. To stand before and gaze upon this picture was to receive an unconscious elevation of the soul; it felt that it had imperfectly, and through a glass darkly, seen the aspect of a heavenly existence, and soared upward, enlarged in thought, 'to regions of a heavenly ancestry.' This was no square, bony-chested, angular, mediæval lay figure. When a man

is full of a grand and noble idea, when his whole soul is filled with a high aspiration, with the inflatus of genius, does not his face shine, his eyes glow, his whole form grow larger? does not his humanity expand?

> 'The warrior goddess gives his frame to shine
> With majesty enlarged and air divine.'

How, then, should it be otherwise with Him? How could the divine soul, busy with the thought of a world redeemed, inflated with the genius of God, do otherwise than shine forth and show itself?

Under this picture stood a great carved oaken chest, standing on four legs as the old presses did, and bound with iron clamps. This was the muniment chest of the family. This was the altar before which Georgie had to stand. On it they had placed the antique family Bible open, its brazen clasps undone. The corners of the dais were filled with ferns and a profusion of those beautiful plants with variegated leaves, interspersed with here and there exotic flowers and strange shrubs and aloes from far-off lands, till it seemed a recess in a tropical forest. They had filled

the old hall with chairs and seats, and these were crowded with the immediate friends of the bride and bridegroom, behind whom stood the servants of the house. A lane or aisle was left up the centre, and this was laid down with crimson cloth, as was the whole floor of the dais. On the right of the dais was a low arched doorway leading into the house; this too was hung with crimson curtains. The novelty of the event, and the striking scene, filled the audience with intense interest, and they waited with impatience. Precisely at eleven o'clock, Neville, accompanied by Noel as best man, entered the hall by the arched doorway near the dais, and walking rapidly to the steps that led up to it, stood there awaiting Georgiana. He was dressed in the only costume possible on such occasions, a costume that did not become him. He would have looked better in a velvet jacket and straw hat. Noel's brown face was paler than usual, and occasional twinges of pain passed across his brow. His arm was in a sling; the old shot wound found out the cold weather and the proximity of the Avon.

As he passed through the arched doorway, closely behind Neville, he saw a figure, that of a slender woman, crouching at one side, half hidden by the scarlet curtains. His heart gave a bound, and he half involuntarily whispered, 'Heloise.' She shrank still more into her hiding-place, but an ice-cold hand just touched his for a second and no more. Heloise it was.

With the cloud of her husband's guilt hanging over her, she could not take open part in any of these ceremonies, and she could not even be persuaded to be present. Still there was a natural desire to witness these exceptional proceedings; and with that view she had hidden herself in the archway, where, out of sight herself, she could see all. This was the first time their hands had met in that surreptitious manner. It was partially, at least, involuntarily; it lasted but a second, but it did take place, and in that second another barrier was broken down. Even more than the pain he was suffering, the sense of that trembling touch paled Noel's face as he stood beside his brother. A moment more,

and Pierce came up the aisle, attended by Verney, of the firm of Williamson, Verney, & Co., for Georgiana, and by Tournell, of Tournell, Tournell, & Co., for Neville. Pierce ascended the dais, and took his stand right in front of and close to the muniment chest, facing the body of the hall. The two solicitors ranged themselves one on each side, but somewhat in the rear. Hardly had this arrangement been completed when a general agitation tokened the approach of the bride. With a slow and stately step, her noble and well-poised head held upright, not defiantly, but with a certain sense of self-assertion, Georgie, in all the radiance of her beauty, passed up the whole length of the hall. She was dressed in white satin, trimmed with antique lace, the train trailing far behind her. She did not wear the traditional orange wreath, nor the veil, but she carried a superb bouquet; and above her forehead, in the masses of hair, shone and glittered a magnificent diamond star, by the side of which was one large bell-shaped white flower. Eight bridesmaids followed her: there had been a difficulty in selecting these, so

many pressed forward for the office, on account of the novelty of the whole thing. Neville met her half way, and together they went up on the dais, and stood facing each other, one on either side of Pierce. The bridesmaids ranged themselves, four upon each hand. Then Pierce, without a moment's delay, taking one step forward, swore each of them upon the Testament in the usual manner (he was a magistrate). He showed them a document, and asked if that was their signature, and receiving an answer in the affirmative, deliberately read as follows, in a low but distinct voice, audible at the farthest corner of the hall:

'We the undersigned, Georgiana Knoyle and Neville Brandon, desire to make this public statement in order that the step we are about to take may not be misunderstood. Primarily our reasons are that man and woman are socially equal; and that they are both therefore entitled to equal liberty of action. By marriage in the ordinary way, the woman abjures her own identity, and the man promises to take upon himself responsibilities

which no human being can ever fulfil, while at the same time both, but particularly the woman, incurs disabilities degrading, and contrary to common sense. We therefore desire in this act to record a solemn protest against the retention of a semi-feudal institution. The formalities we are about to go through are established by no recognised authority, but we prefer to thus publicly proclaim our union out of respect for the esteem of society, and with the view of setting a precedent. Our other reasons are set forth at length in a document which we have composed together. Copies of this paper will be handed to every person in this assembly, and it will afterwards be printed. (Signed.)'

Pierce then took up a small manuscript book, and turning to Neville said, 'What is your full and correct name, your parish, your county, and your age?'

Neville. My name is Neville Brandon, of Bramleigh parish, county Surrey; and my age is thirty.

Pierce put the same question to Georgiana.

Georgiana. My name is Georgiana Knoyle,

of Knoyle parish, county H——; and my age is twenty-four.

Pierce (to Neville). Is this woman related to you in any of the prohibited degrees; or is there any other legal impediment to your marriage?

Neville. She is not related to me, nor is there any legal impediment.

Georgiana answered the same question.

Pierce. For what period are you mutually desirous of being joined together in marriage?

Neville and Georgiana. For three years.

Pierce (to Neville.) Repeat these words after me: I, Neville Brandon, am desirous of entering into the state of marriage with thee, Georgiana Knoyle, for the period of three years.

Neville did so, and Pierce taking Georgiana's hand placed it in his. Then he loosed her hand, and she repeated the same statement after him, and he put her hand again in Neville's.

Pierce. Take the ring, and repeat after me: I take thee, Georgiana Knoyle, to be my wife for the space of three years, and I place this ring upon thy finger in token that I accept all

the responsibilities which the laws of the realm place upon me for so doing.

Georgiana repeated much the same formula; and then Neville placed the ring upon her finger. Up till now the ceremony had proceeded with such rapidity that the spectators had had no time to reflect. But while placing the ring on her finger there was a pause for a moment. In that pause, the sun shone out. It was only the weak February sun, but it streamed through the narrow arrow-slit, and fell in a long beam of light on Georgiana's splendid golden hair, lighting it up with a glow like a halo round her head, and then passing on, rested upon the dusty sandy roadway in the picture at the feet of the Christ. A murmur of admiration arose; one of those slight movements rather than sounds by which a critical audience testifies its approbation; but it was perhaps rather the artistic effect than anything else that they applauded.

Neville and Georgiana then wrote their names in the fly-leaf of the old family Bible, which in the absence of any authorised registry they had chosen to take its place. Messrs.

Verney and Tournell (the solicitors) and Noel also signed it as witnesses, and Pierce added his own at the foot. He then rapidly turned, and said: 'I pronounce ye man and wife for three years.' This completed the ceremony. Georgiana placed her arm in Neville's, and retraced her steps down the aisle, while at the same moment the strains of the 'Wedding March' of Mendelssohn, that beautiful burst of music, came pealing through the arched doorway from the organ in the library. The spectators rose, as if by instinct, as the pair passed, and watched them till the folding doors were shut, and they had gone out of sight; then they dispersed to prepare for the *déjeuner*. With that we have nothing to do, except to remark that Heloise was not present, and that Noel excused himself, on the plea of his aching arm, and rode away abruptly. When a man is deeply, madly in love, it is not a pleasant sensation to watch another, even if that other is his own brother, tangibly realising his happiness.

In the afternoon, Neville and Georgie departed for the Continent.

That entry in the old family Bible, and their signatures to it, was not the only result of this singular proceeding. Philip the clergyman, who would not be present, no sooner heard that it had actually taken place, than he retired to the vestry-room of his church, and taking out the old register-book (the new ones admit of no such entries), he wrote on one of the vacant pages at the end:

'*February* 17, 187—. This day was consummated a very freak and imagination of the Evil Principle under the guise of so-called Progress' (Philip was fond of capital letters), 'my misguided brother acting as officiator. Neville Brandon and Georgiana Knoyle were united in unholy Matrimony at his house, for Three years, Heaven save the mark, in the presence of two solicitors and a cloud of witnesses. May Heaven grant them grace to see the error of their Ways, and to return, and be joined together by Me in this my Church, as the Rubrics of the Establishment do direct! And to this end will I bend my Prayers till this be happily accomplished. —PHILIP LESTRANGE, *Vicar of Avonbourne*.'

CHAPTER V.

Of all the secret police that ever oppressed a nation there is none equal to the press for ubiquitousness. The French police are notorious as a power, to whom even the very head of the government must bow, whether that head be Louis XIV., Napoleon III., or Marshal MacMahon. No one knows who the agents of such a police are—they are a species of social Jesuits. The very dearest and nearest friend to whom you have been telling your most hidden concerns may be greedily listening with the view of retailing it afterwards to his chief. But our press is worse than this; it actually beats the police. It acts as a police upon the police—espying out all their faults, their follies, mistakes, and lack of insight. Therefore the police hate the press with a sincerity impossible to exaggerate. And the two classes are so civil to each other too, out-

wardly—always ready to exchange information. The police will never accept a theory from the press; they invariably set to work to disprove the theory started by the press, and just as invariably succeed in proving the very facts they denied with such fatuous complacency. But this press is a terrible police. Its agents are everywhere; they stand behind the throne, and they chat amicably with the peasant in his cottage. The very banker in his private country house, in his most secret study, surrounded with his telegrams in cipher, his enigmatical correspondence, and equally enigmatical books of figures, is conscious that through the very walls, of even the ceiling overhead, a power is watching him, listening to the scraping of his pen. You may call a meeting of your private friends, rigidly excluding the reporters, admitting only by ticket, watching the door yourself; yet the next morning all the proceedings are in print. How is this? It is because everybody writes in this our day—clergy, lawyers, doctors, telegraph clerks, post-office people, literally everybody — and how can you tell which of your private friends

may not conceal under his smiling face and dress-coat a fatal faculty for writing and a strong memory? At Avonbourne, of course, they all knew that the affair would be talked of and alluded to in the newspapers, but they did not dread that much. Most people of any social rank at all see their names and their affairs in the newspapers once a year at least. We live so much in public nowadays. Time was when only great potentates, such as the emperor of this, or the king of that, and ambassador so-and-so, had their private movements recorded. But now Mrs. Brown or Miss Robinson no sooner arrives at the sea-side than their names appear in the local gazettes. Every one gets so accustomed to it that nobody cares much about it, except some of the poor thin-skinned ones, with an overwhelming sense of their own importance. So that they really never gave a thought about the newspapers. But some one must have been at that marriage party with a quick ear and a vigorous memory; for the very next morning the most enterprising of the morning papers had two columns of large print and one of

small type—first, a description of the whole scene, painfully graphic, with all the real names of the persons in any way concerned; next, the text of the formalities of the marriage; and, lastly, the text of that document which Georgie and Neville had drawn up together. In addition to this there was a leading article upon the report—one of those articles for which that paper is famous.

It is the fashion, by the way, to sneer at the *Daily Telegraph;* to point and gibe at the classicisms, at the mixture of the far-fetched analogy with the ready slang of the hour. Considered in the abstract, in the calm retreat of the study, with the window open, and a cool breeze fanning the brow, a scent of clover, and the hum of bees, all this criticism may be well enough. Those who can sit and write thus, surrounded with every pleasure, with plenty of time to pick and choose not only their thoughts but their words, may find it easy enough to spot the ungrammatical expressions —the omission of a diphthong in the Latin quotations, or to sneer at the tawdry sentiment. But put them in the place of the

author of the despised article—let them be driven to minutes in which to compose; let them have to rapidly scan a rough proof of some report, and then to reflect upon it and to choose those reflections which will not only be most picturesque and amusing, but also best suited to a peculiar class of readers—and where would be these same sneerers and gibers then? They would write, if they wrote anything at all, the most commonplace and dullest of trash. Without a doubt, it displays an immense genius, a capacity for adaptation, a plastic mind, to be able to compose such articles as these on the spur of the moment. How admirably, too, they are suited to the popular taste—the taste of a half-educated public, that likes to be reminded of its studies or its 'crams,' and yet not be obliged to hunt out the translation for itself, but to see it plainly indicated in the context; that likes, too, the well-turned, sharp, epigrammatic periods, and a seasoning of anecdote fresh and unexpected. The poet is born and not made, and so is the writer of a *Daily Telegraph* article. Latterly, this much derided and abused

paper has taken a stand which elevates it far above its wobbling crippled companions. It has moved with the age, and expanded its functions to suit the requirements of the social life of the times. Every one now takes an interest in science and in discovery. Every one reads the addresses of men like Professor Tyndall, and the journeys of men like Livingstone. All take an interest, a deep and abiding interest, in these things; and this interest grows daily with the spread of education. People want to go further than these explorers have gone; they long to hear of the great work being carried on to its logical consequence and conclusion. If Livingstone went very near the source of the Nile, the public feel an anxious desire to go still nearer; if Sherard Osborne or Markham point out a channel by which the North Pole can be reached, the public desire to see some vessel start upon the adventurous voyage. But no one fulfils this legitimate, this even laudable public wish. No millionnaire comes to the front and offers his superfluous gold to fit out an Arctic expedition, or to construct a telescope capable of solv-

ing the problems of space, or to build a machine that shall really fly. What on earth do they do with their money? They cannot eat it nor drink it all, nor spend it all on horse-racing and yachting. Why does not some one or other of them come forward and endeavour to satisfy this craving of the public mind, and at the same time cover themselves with honour? Are they all blind and fatuous? does the very fact of the possession of unlimited means close the eyes to the perception of how those means can be utilised and turned to the highest pleasure, besides popularity, and therefore profit? For in our days popularity is another word, an equivalent, for profit, not only to newspapers, but to millionnaires and gentlemen. Years succeed to years, and yet no one comes forward, and says, 'I will satisfy the curiosity and the laudable wishes of the people.' At last the *Daily Telegraph* has stepped boldly into the gap, and nobly intends to devote some portion of its gains to clearing up what human ingenuity can of the obscurities which surround the Past and the Distant. It began by sending the Assyrian student, Mr. Smith, to

the mounds at Koyunyik to search for more leaves of the library of the old world. Now it is busy with an expedition into the centre and heart of Africa to set at rest the vexed question of the Nile source. A glorious triumph it would be indeed to journalism if the attempt should succeed, after failures on every hand—failures by men of talent, of armed forces, of kings, and even of nations,—if at last a newspaper, a despised newspaper, a common penny print, should clear away the mystery. And a triumph not only for journalism, but for all men of intellect, now disgusted and tired with the old trammels of routine. If the tone of newspaper writing is coarse, in bad taste, vulgar—if it be so, whose fault is it? Not of the writers, most decidedly, for there are those among them educated to the highest pitch, and possessing every refinement; but the fault of those for whom they write, to whose mental condition the articles must be adapted, just in the same way as they try to teach children to read through pictures in the primers.

None of them at Avonbourne had anticipated this fame. It came on them with a rush,

and took away their breath—this report, and leader in addition. It stunned them for a few moments; then they began to awake to the criticisms and the remarks which must ensue throughout the length and breadth of the land. This report, this leader, had that morning been laid upon a hundred thousand breakfast-tables at least. As it was so important to them, they naturally imagined it would be so to others; and they fancied the bold type staring everybody in the face, unmistakable, not to be escaped from. What is there so light as conversation? The gossamer, the thistle-down, the tiniest insect floating in the air, is heavy, cumbrous, compared with it. It flies swift as the telegraph; it penetrates walls and roofs, this mystic and invisible thing. You cannot hide yourself from it—you cannot escape it. You may go away, and leave no address, so that your letters may not reach you; you may sit in solitude on the beach or in the forest. Let it be where it may, the murmur will reach you; it will force itself upon you. It may be only the waiter, who drops a word in sheer wish to be civil and informing. It may be a remark

casually made by one to another in a crowd, not meant to be heard farther. But this conversation is irresistible—you must hear it. You may just as well go and sit by the roadside at once, and have it over. They heard enough of it at Avonbourne. There was a buzzing in the air, a hum overhead, like the sound of the 'midsummer hum,' the noise of myriads of invisible creatures mingling in an endless dance.

The mammas and papas were especially bitter upon this horrid innovation. 'So highly improper; so immoral; how *could* any woman, any *lady*, do such a thing? Dear me, dear me!'

They had a sufficiently good reason for disliking it. If the daughters only married for three years, how many of them would come back? A man would never get entirely rid of his olive-branches. They would be perpetually returning like the traditional bad halfpenny. The mammas had had too much experience of their daughters, too familiar acquaintance with their pets and tempers, their secret faults, not to know full well that

barely a tenth of the lot could be relied upon to remain. They dreaded the possibility of such an innovation as limited matrimony coming into fashion; therefore they turned the vials of their wrath and venom upon it, and called in the *odium theologicum* to demolish its merest chance of success. It was so immoral, so unscriptural. Dreadful, shocking, horrid! An awful Woman! They did not so much wonder at the Man, though he must be a Wretch! The clergy, one and all, agreed in carrying on this cry of immorality and unscripturality. They raged and foamed against it. They boiled over it. They got up indignation everywhere. They, too, had a very good reason for all this; they had vested interests to consider. So on this point they all agreed; Ritualist, Broad, Low, High, Nonconformist, Methodist, Itinerant, the whole jing-bang, as the Americans say, never ceased their cuckoo cry, 'Immoral, unscriptural!'

The philosophers looked at it in another light. They referred you to Sir John Lubbock's book; and advised you to read about the conditions of social relationship among the

savages, as illustrating the primeval state of affairs. In this most primeval state, the sexes only dwelt together so long as fancy suggested.

Now, said the philosophers, see how the outcome of the highest civilisation bears the strongest analogy to the proceedings of the darkest savagery! Hence, behold the source where civilisation should go for its lessons and its inspirations. It should study primeval man, and then apply all the modern arts and discoveries to carry out these original instincts to their grandest development.

The lawyers, like the clergy, were unanimous in condemnation. They had a sharp discussion as to whether or no Pierce, as a magistrate, and sworn to uphold the laws of his country, was not liable to a prosecution, or at least to be struck off the list of magistrates, for this daring step. They ridiculed the whole idea as wild and impracticable to the absurdest extent. They pointed out what injurious effects it would have upon the rights of property. They likewise had very good reasons for their excitement. The new process was

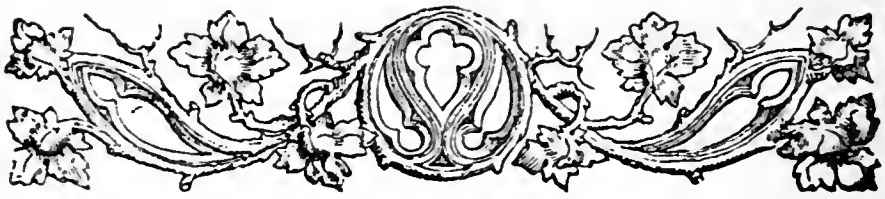
so simple and so natural that it quite dispensed with the necessity of employing legal gentlemen. People could manage their own affairs, a most undesirable state of things. But the bitterest critics of all were those very persons upon whose sympathy and cordial approval Georgiana counted, the women, namely, who called themselves advocates of woman's rights, and went about the country spouting and lecturing on the same. They ran her down as having spoilt the cause in her overzeal; in good truth they were jealous and envious, not only of the strong will which, in one single step, had done more than all the lot of them together in twenty years, but jealous and envious too of the *notoriety* she had thereby gained. She stood out in a strong light, and they were reduced to shadows. This they could not bear; for these so-called strong-minded women were the weakest and feeblest of their sex, mean, envious, paltry to the last degree.

Georgie's own private friends in London were, after all, the most lenient. First of all

they heartily laughed at her, and revelled in the enjoyment of a new sensation. Then they felt an accession of vanity—always a pleasurable sense—how infinitely superior they were to this eccentric individual. Lastly, they took to pitying her, and it became the fashion in this select circle to bitterly resent the newspaper attacks upon poor Georgie. They resolved, since all the world ran her down, to patronise her, and make much of her, when she returned to London. She should go with them everywhere. In point of fact, they were anxious to appear different from any one else —*distingué*. To do them justice, there were one or two who really did take an interest in this novel social experiment.

After a while they began to long for the return of this new lion, that they might pat it and pet it, and especially that other people might see them patting and petting. But Georgie had at least one class of enthusiastic champions. All the young men in the country, without exception, were hers to a man. They lauded her to the skies. And the young

ladies? Well, they tossed their heads and never read of such things, not they; and all you could get out of them was a simper, and 'Really now—now really!'



CHAPTER VI.

How refreshing it is to pick up Froissart or even Machiavelli's *Florence.* Everybody had something to do in those days, and if they did not always enjoy doing it, they experienced, at all events, a great deal of genuine emotion. This is just exactly what we never get now. It is all so languid and smooth and soft, so delicate and refined, it all passes over like gossamers, tickling a little but leaving no impression. What ever we shall do with ourselves in another half a century no one can surmise. Possibly every one will be dead of *ennui* before then. But in the old Anglo-Norman days, when the very proprietors of the land had to maintain their possessions by sheer force, and were always on the alert lest the serf should rise, or a powerful neighbour invade,—in those days of warfare and rapine they had something to do. It was a wicked

and cruel time; a time which no one can ever wish to return. But the perpetual fighting, the ceaseless clash of steel, the restlessness of the day, left no space for *ennui;* they were all busy, hard at work threshing men as the rustic threshes corn with his flail.

Later down, too, in the age of the subtle politician, in the age of Machiavelli and Cæsar Borgia, what a glittering show it is, and a glittering show with this difference from modern pageants, that it is alive! Behind the banners and the processions; behind the marching soldiers and the dancing mountebanks; behind the very music, the gay scarfs, and the incessant laughter, there is a life, a *verve*, a reality. These men *felt* as well as acted. In our day they act alone. It is a wonderful history, this tale of the Florentine republic, written by the model of all politicians. It is one long web of human ingenuity from beginning to end; a record of men and women striving and struggling against each other for the mastery; and this same eagerness and anxiousness lends a reality to all they did, and excites a corresponding interest

in the chronicle of their times. True it is that in our day we too have something to struggle for—something to do—but it is an incentive which does not touch the deeper, grander chords of human nature. There is Money—the one object and aim of the millions. This is something to do. But it does not bring out the chivalry, the finer feelings; it does not stir the heart and intellect, and waken up all the courage and resolution of the soul, like the trumpet blast of the knights as they charged to the battle. On the contrary, it gradually deadens and dulls all the passions but one, the most despicable of all; it centres the man in himself, and of himself he soon gets tired, and then comes *ennui*. Worse than this, it requires no reality.

Your old knight of steel could not put a dummy in the saddle and send that to the charge. He must be there in person, full of manly vigour and iron determination; shadows and shams were of no avail then. Now all the study and effort is to make a counterfeit presentment pass for true; and it is no very difficult matter, since all the world is

agreed to accept shams, and to require nothing more than that they shall conform to the usages of the hour. If by any chance the sham is a novelty, if it is not in strict conformity, there is a great sputtering; but provided it tallies with the shams that have preceded it and to which we are accustomed, all is well. There is no reality in it. It is all Paper and Credit. But these fellows in Florence were not satisfied with shams; or if they did succumb to such things, it was as the clever guise of a reality really deceived and not affecting to believe.

What, then, has become of all the original energy of man's nature? Has the race which now exists none—has it all vanished? How hard people work at paring down and subduing their own inward vigour, both physical and mental; how singularly hard they labour to reduce themselves to lay figures, passionless, purposeless, mere machines for eating and drinking and sleeping! The slightest evidence of an effort is enough to condemn a man utterly as a rude being, a barbarian, an uncivilised savage. It is fash-

ionable to be languid, delicate, refined; to be undecided and careless, indifferent, *yawnish*. But pare away the natural energy, reduce the original vigour as much as ever they may, still there remains an ineradicable vein of restlessness. So that we see, every now and then, society rush hither and thither in great waves, seeking in some new sensation to find an outlet for the pent-up motion.

What a curious system it is to teach us, not only at school, but at home, and in the early part of our life, ideas and feelings which we must afterwards spend years in endeavouring to unlearn, while we meantime suffer no little deception and misery! Next after the alphabet and the primer, they teach us, or try to teach us, to be 'good.' That is to obey, to believe, to choose the right and eschew the wrong, to be conscientious, to fly to the help of the distressed, to subdue ourselves, and to consider others before us; above all things to be truthful. Even the least impressionable of us cannot help but imbibe a certain amount of faith in these doctrines. Yet those who teach us must know very well

that we shall have to spend years unlearning these lessons by bitter experience. Follow these instructions, and what is the result? Disappointment, loss, deceit, fraud; we become mere carcasses for the vultures to feed upon. As for the right, of what avail is that? The technical invariably overrides equity, till we curse the very day in which we learnt to trust a reed which broke and pierced us. So, too, with another old tradition, the tradition of Work; that work we must, because the ground is cursed, and we must eat bread in the sweat of our brow. That work, moreover, is ennobling and dignifying; that it enlarges man's nature and makes him nearer a god; that there is something grand about it. Also, on more practical grounds, that by work alone money can be made, and position and independence assumed. All these are the merest traditions, the sheerest fallacies. Society has found out long ago that it is by no means a matter of necessity to work in order to eat bread; for do not thousands who never lift their hands to their mouths revel in wine and sweetmeats, in purple and fine linen? As to

work being ennobling and dignified, look at the drunken mechanics and labourers. But taking this as a piece of special pleading, look at the case of a man who really does work as a man should, is it not a very sorry sight to see the intellect so busy over a trifle? That money can be made by work alone is a downright lie, and nothing less. Astute society has learnt long ago that in ninety-nine times out of the hundred, money is made by a combination of circumstances, by luck, by calculation, and most of all by Humbug. Why, then, should we all be brought up in these antique and exploded beliefs—why should we all have to work our way through the experiences and miserable disappointments arising from these fond and delusive hopes? Why not tell us at once the bitter truth, and teach us to meet it in the beginning face to face, and hand to hand—this 'hard hand-play' of the old Saxon poet—so that we may be prepared, and lose no time in following the *ignis fatuus*, and believing it to be the rising sun?

We know so much nowadays. Everything has been done. Everything has been thought.

Every possible emotion has been felt in every imaginary manner. Every combination conceivable of human relationship has been worked out, and the quarry is empty. The world has grown so small. Time was (it was a long time ago) when there was a Verge, an Edge, beyond which there was an unknown something for man to seek. All the continents are found now; the geographers assure us that no more remains to be discovered. Excepting only a few small spots, and these, too, narrowing daily, the whole surface of the earth has been surveyed and mapped out and reduced to scale. So, too, it is with social life. It is growing narrower hour by hour, simply from sheer exhaustion. There is nothing to do. All the emotions and pleasures have been surveyed and mapped out and reduced to scale. We know to a hair's breadth how much we ought to cry, and how much to laugh, on every occasion; nothing can possibly take us by surprise and shock us into originality. We are a great deal worse off than the Athenians, who stood gossiping and crying for 'something new;' for we do not

believe in the probability of anything new ever turning up, and if it did it would make us yawn as rather a bore. We got so refined and delicate at one time, that some one started the idea of refreshment by means of mingling with the rude and uneducated.

So everybody became a district-visitor, and climbed up dirty staircases, and looked at crippled people, and smelt horrid smells. Then came the Red Cross mania—everybody became a nurse. But it was of no avail. Simplicity itself was nothing new; and a horrible bore too. Was it not of Budha or some Oriental deity that they fable has to pass through every phase of existence, from the humblest insect up to man, and from man up to the angels, and in each existence to go through all the emotions and combinations possible to it, till finally, having completed the whole round of life, he became merged in the Deity? In our time society has nearly done all this; but there is no sign of the approaching apotheosis. It grows sandier, duller, dustier, more desert-like, year by year. As Heine said, translated by a true poet,

whose name does not remain in memory at this moment, the world has got so dusty—

> 'So rotten, crooked, cold, and small,
> That were there not a bit of loving,
> There'd be no living here at all.'

Since then, however, all the 'loving' is exhausted. The highest and most ethereal of all the passions has been fathomed, surveyed, mapped, and reduced to scale. The theodolite of analysis has levelled it to commonplace. We do not travel on foot now. We step on a moving platform, and *wait* till we reach our destination. We do not love now; it is all done for us,—in books. By the bye there is, speaking of walking, something horrible in boots. Have you ever been to a public meeting, and sat rather towards the front, near to the platform, so as to be able to see under the long table they generally place on it, and behind which the platform people sit? Just after listening to some wonderful peroration, full of sentiments and aspirations which you, a student, know full well to be as old as the hills, and to have filtered down into their present form from the

time of Plato—just then you drop your gaze, and it rests upon the row of boots under this platform table. Boots of all descriptions—shining boots, dull boots, dusty boots; big, little, medium, square-toed, narrow, broad, splodgy, all sorts—but *boots*. Socrates and Plato, Leonidas and Cæsar—all the heroes—the gods too, walked with naked feet, or in sandals. They knew nothing of Day & Martin, of ugly squat earthenware bottles, of a thick odoriferous liquid, of brushes, nor of scrapers. Their feet were open, free, unrestrained. Look at the feet of the statues, how beautiful they are. But the feet in those boots—'cabined, cribbed, confined,' distorted. Somehow there is something about these boots at which my mind revolts. No man can be a god in boots. They are the very symbols of our dirty macadamised times. Our very souls are getting macadamised, laid down, levelled, and metalled, so that we may run in grooves for ever—smoothly, without the slightest fear of seeing anything fresh. Everything is labelled now; you can find it all in books of reference. What with dictionaries, gazet-

teers, concordances, indexes, guides, and so forth, the universe can easily be packed in a moderately-sized bookcase. Why study—why learn botany, or geology, or physiology, or any other science—why exercise your mind or memory? All the memory requisite is to recollect the letters of the alphabet under which the subject can be classed, and then turn to the innumerable encyclopædias. Original research is labour lost, especially as after it is found there is nothing new in it.

The men can swear, and drink, and play billiards, and back horses, and ruin themselves, and generally go to the devil; very tame and used-up amusements, it is true, but still something to do. But the poor ladies—what on earth *are* they to do in the years to come? With flirting a science—dressing a mere mechanical imitation—parties, balls, visits, simply matters of monotonous business—what *are* they to do? Even illness is no excuse to avoid *ennui;* for all the Spas are exhausted, and all the seaside resorts explored. The limits of human ingenuity appear to be reached, and we cannot as yet add a new

hemisphere to the brain, and so discover novel combinations. The flattest and tamest of all are the 'spirits' who promised so much at first, and turned out to be as dull as the most *ennui*-eaten mortal.

All of us go tramping round and round like a horse turning a mill, each following in the other's footsteps; and even in this there is a little relief, for it saves us the trouble of attempting to discover a new path only to be disappointed. There never was a time when invention and discovery were at such a premium. Witness a new colour, for instance, or rather a new shade, for the possible colours were all in the dusthole long, long ago. When gas tar was found to be so prolific a source of new tints, what a rage there was for them! Everybody wore magenta within a month of its discovery; even the fearfully odious eau de Nil took amazingly for a while. But the elder and more experienced are not satisfied even with this. They have seen so many new inventions, the charm has gone by; it is impossible to feel once more the charm of novelty. The worst of it is that we are

all growing so old now. Nobody is young any longer; at least, no one is youthful. It is the greatest crime we can commit. But, alas! the youngest know such a lot, that there is little fear, if any, of them falling into that sin.

At this moment two young creatures—one of each sex—are engaged in working out this very problem, to their own satisfaction at all events; their wandering planets are rapidly drifting across our orbit.

The problem is a new life. These two were unconscious of what they were doing, but they were working it out. As Georgiana and Neville faded away in the west, these arose in their turn in the east. But as yet and for some time there is but a faint glimmer of them, or rather of one of them.

CHAPTER VII.

THERE was no society in Venice, so they moved to Vienna. Their idea was not to conceal themselves; in point of fact, their primary wish was to be the observed of all observers. And they had their desire to the full.

It was one of the gayest winters ever known in the gay Austrian capital, and Carlotta was seen everywhere. She did not restrict herself to the fashionable plainness in dress of tamer London; here she blazed forth in all that gorgeousness of colour which suited her tulip-like beauty. Her dress was magnificent, her extravagance unequalled. This is a sure way of attracting attention.

The nameless Americans who come to Paris, dating from impossible places in the western wildernesses, without a pedigree, without a title, a reputation, or even a

good face, make to themselves circles of admirers, crowds of spectators, simply and solely by the power of the almighty dollar. There is a fascination in watching a gambler at the *rouge-et-noir* table whose stakes are fortunes, who wins ten thousand or loses twice as much in a few minutes—there is a glamour about it. Carlotta obtained all the *éclat* that the most lavish expenditure could arouse. Where did she get the money from? When she received Horton's communication from her solicitor, she had revolved the necessity of taking plenty of cash with her, for she knew full well that without money Louis would soon tire of her. The mean detestable cynic would soon weary of charms for which he had to pay dearly. It was absolutely necessary that she should have money with her. She reckoned up her resources, and found that out of her own annual income—the interest on the 100,000*l.* which she had thought her own—she had not one shilling left. Of the cheques she received from Horton, over and above this, there was about 250*l.* remaining. This was a mere bagatelle. She had her

diamonds and other jewels it is true; but she, with the instinct of her type, clung to those ornaments almost as closely as to life itself. Dimly and in the far distance she foresaw a time when they might be extremely useful to her. They must not be sold or pawned; she must find some other way of raising money.

At last it occurred to her that as yet no one but Williamson, Verney, & Co., the solicitors, were aware of her rupture with Horton. To the world she was still the wife of the famous millionnaire, almost certain to succeed to his countless wealth. There still remained Horton's reputation for wealth to trade on. Carlotta in her most off-hand and indifferent way wrote a note to one of those bill-discounting firms with whom she knew Horton had large dealings. The head of the house waited upon her obsequiously within half an hour of receiving it. With an air of contemptuous scorn for the mere commoner, she handed him a slip of paper on which was inscribed a list of her debts, and with a few words explained to him that she had inadvertently exceeded her allowance, and did not desire

(this she hinted) to ask her husband for more at that moment. Horton, she mentioned casually, allowed her 50,000*l.* per annum. These debts were only 25,000*l.*; she could pay them in three months, but could not be annoyed with people pestering. The bill-discounter, eager to get the wife of the millionnaire into his hands, certain in his own mind that Horton would pay anything rather than have an action brought against his countess, saw a chance of making a superb coup, and fell into her trap in a moment. On her note-of-hand alone he advanced her 25,000*l.*, Carlotta not even troubling with imperial disdain to ask what interest he charged. The bill-discounter inserted 25 per cent in the note, and believed he saw his way to 40.

Within an hour after his departure Carlotta had cashed his cheque, and filled one compartment of her dressing-case with two hundred and fifty 100*l.* Bank of England notes. A week afterwards she was in Vienna with Louis. The Austrian banker with whom she deposited her money bowed to the ground in very humiliation of amazement as Carlotta

tossed him the piles of notes, as much as to say, 'This is nothing.' It is wonderful what a respect they have abroad for a Bank-of-England note. They have as superstitious a veneration for the oblong bit of paper as they have for the Host itself. Its effect is magical, far superior to solid gold. Imagine, then, the stupefaction of the man to whom a lady brought two hundred and fifty all at once, and all for a large amount. The story flew over the city in two hours; it crept into the papers. Carlotta was marked out in a moment.

These dear Viennese are not so straitlaced as we are in England. With the report of her wealth there soon also flew about the equally interesting report of her elopement and of her rank. Instead of everybody turning up their noses, the effect was precisely the reverse. They look upon these matters in a romantic way abroad; or if they think upon them seriously at all, it is philosophically, as students engaged in dissecting a new phase of human life. They crowded round her; they fêted her; they invited her to their houses, and gave her grand receptions.

An archduke, one very near the throne, let it be understood that he was her devoted slave. Her beauty became the talk of the city. In all this they left Louis quite out of sight. Nobody ever thought of him. He was but the accessory—the canvas on which this great artist worked, merely the horse which bore her burden; quite out of the question—a shadow; a sort of chaperon, nothing more. Carlotta rose daily on the breath of popular ardour. She wore her diamonds—an archduchess saw them, and envied them.

The archduchess had many friends—a strong and impregnable position; but she had also many enemies. She imprudently attacked Carlotta. Carlotta sneered, and attacked her in turn. It became war to the knife between them; yet neither had ever spoken a word to the other. A faction formed round each. After a while these factions took a political aspect. The archduchess became the centre of a purely Austrian circle; Carlotta as a foreigner, and from England, naturally attracted the Hungarian section. So

they ranged themselves one against the other. It so happened that just at this time there were great battles in the political arena. The Hungarians were pressing hard to obtain the recognition of their independence. Eager to gain their point, the great chiefs of the party made use of Carlotta. On the Continent women—always beautiful women—have played an important part in the rise and fall of nations; a part prosaic England can never comprehend. These chiefs recognised in Carlotta a genius to their heart's delight. She was the very agent they wanted. Deak himself waited upon her. The archduchess, dying with envy and jealousy, had recourse to her family, who were very powerful; and they moved the throne for an order to invite her to depart. But at that moment the Austrian Government was in a critical condition. The Bohemians, the Hungarians, the Czechs, the Slavs, were all in a ferment; Roumania was in an unpleasant state; all was in dangerous uncertainty. Especially the Hungarian party were domineering; Carlotta was notoriously favoured by them. Then they remembered

that they had heavy loans due to a certain Horton Knoyle, a millionnaire. This English lady, report said, was his wife. It was quite true that she had eloped from him; still one never knew; she might return to him again. She was a dangerous woman; she might through him upset the money market. No, it was too dangerous. Carlotta could not be invited to depart.

This defeat of the archduchess became known, and the result was of course a tremendous impulse to Carlotta's importance. The Hungarian party began to have a genuine faith in her. A certain ambassador from a certain State, very anxious of foreign support, called upon her privately, and did his utmost to bring her round to his views. Meantime there was the most incessant succession of operas, balls, parties, Heaven knows what—dissipations of every conceivable kind, and Carlotta the central figure everywhere—Carlotta and her diamonds. She well understood the value of these diamonds.

To add the finishing touch, it came to pass that the Austrian Government, dismayed

at the aspect of affairs, recognised Hungary as an independent State, and granted important privileges. At that ceremony Carlotta was present, not as a visitor and as a spectator, but as a principal actor; and the Emperor himself, not a little curious over this wonderful creature, of whom he had heard so much, paid her some little but marked attention. He dared not go any farther, though he was dying of curiosity to converse with her. He was too closely watched to leave the palace on the sly. Poor, wretched creatures, these emperors, mere stalled beasts, tended with such reverent care. O, yes; but never allowed one moment of real freedom. Carlotta all the while was hard at work while the sun shone. She knew very well she could not depend upon Louis; she watched him constantly, and detected a few slight but unmistakable symptoms. It was all very well while she could keep the balloon in the air; but afterwards? Therefore she made hay while the sun shone; the hay she made was the admiration of men. This is not exactly the precise definition. Men in our day are

much too clever to admire anything. They have seen so much, and been so terribly wicked in their time, that there is no genuine emotion left in them.

But there is a species of fashionable emulation which passes very well for emotion. Carlotta knew her power in exciting this fashionable emulation, and she used it unsparingly. Specially she played on the poor archduke. These archdukes have never been famous for much wisdom since the great Napoleon gave them such a rapping on the head. He woke them out of their slumber; but he hit them too hard—the poor wretches have never recovered it. This particular archduke was softer than most of his kind. He was a good horseman; a splendid figure; he was really handsome in his full military costume. If he could have been set up in a shop-window in Regent-street, dressed in that costume, and slowly turned round, like a leg of mutton before the fire, he would have made the fortune of an outfitter. There it began, and there it ended. There was only one chance for this being—it was the chance of

his getting a handsome wife. He might then have been useful in one way; there might have ensued a perpetuation of handsome people. But they tied him up to an inane, flat-faced German woman—a creature about four feet high, and four feet six in circumference—they who had the pick of all Austria, Hungary, and Bohemia, to say nothing of Italy and the eastern shore of the Adriatic, famous for beautiful women. So that he grew softer and more useless than ever. He had begun to drink, but not furiously yet. Then he saw Carlotta; she intoxicated him quickly. As the man was a booby, and could not understand delicate flirtation — a creature upon whom all the refined machinery of titillation was lost—she allowed him certain familiarities: for instance, he was allowed to mumble her hand; and once she even went so far as to make no objection to his kneeling down and kissing her foot, or rather her boot. He was very far gone indeed, this poor fellow. He really loved her in his way. He wished his wife at the devil. He would have married Carlotta with the greatest pleasure.

He forgot one thing—first, that Carlotta was not exactly marriageable; secondly, that if he was himself eligible, the Austrian Government, with true paternal care, would have packed him off on a voyage round the world, out of arm's way. In Rasselas's time they had no very great difficulty with these shambling princes. They had only to shut them up in a valley and forget all about them. Unfortunately there is no such valley nowadays. Therefore we see in the papers every now and then telegrams from New Zealand and the Cape of Good Hope, Japan and such places, how such and such a prince, or such a royal noodle, with his suite had called there *en route* round the universe.

The voyage *à la* Captain Cook is the Happy Valley of our days. But the archduke being married they let him alone, and he had no difficulty in entangling his heart. Carlotta thought the thing over seriously. He was about the best of the lot—*i.e.* he had most money. It did not take her long to make up her mind. He was evidently the very man for her purpose. It was time too that she

made some decisive step, for the winter season was rapidly drawing to a close, and a certain event grew inconveniently near. She looked round her; the archduke had these to recommend him: first his money, next his rank, thirdly his stupidity. He was sincere enough to really love her. Therefore she loosened the reins a little with which she drove him, and patted him on the back. Thus encouraged he grew bolder, and at last asked her to come with him down to a quiet place of his in Bohemia.

This hardly suited Carlotta just then; so she was virtuously indignant, but not *too* indignant. Archduke grew more and more pressing—offered to leave the country, and all his claims to distinction, to be with her. This hardly suited Carlotta either. At last she consented to put him to the test. She would meet him in Venice quietly in three months' time; if he still loved her, why perhaps—The archduke rapturously kissed her, and then went on his knees to beg pardon, and Carlotta kicked him.

Now it so happened that the very arch-

duchess over whom Carlotta had triumphed in the Hungarian victory was herself unmarried. She had a title, but nothing else in particular. These creatures are apt to turn out white elephants, people are shy of marrying them. This archduke—we will call him Leopold, to save trouble, though that was not his real name—was her cousin; and she had had designs on him, designs of which Leopold was utterly oblivious. She was disappointed at the paternal arrangements made by the Government; but that was after all not his fault. But this Carlotta—this English *lady* (she did not use 'lady,' but a very unflattering name)—was quite a different thing. She hated Carlotta as none but women who have had their whole lives subdued and screwed down can hate their more free sisters. She cared so little who saw it, and became so open in her enmity, that Leopold, stupid as he was, noticed it. The lout went straight to her and boxed her ears in the midst of a crowded assembly, just as he used to do when they were children and played together. The archduchess scratched him, and then fainted in sheer spite.

Vienna rang with it. Carlotta was satisfied; she had made a *reputation*. She would retire now for a little while. She took a country house in Styria and left Vienna, taking good care that Leopold should not discover her whereabouts. A little event was about to happen which it was very undesirable he should know anything about. That little event was the birth of a son, but not an heir, to Louis.

And Louis himself?'

And the two hundred and fifty 100*l.* Bank-of-England notes?

CHAPTER VIII.

Louis stood under a chestnut-tree, sheltering himself from the heavy rain, not only with the branches, but by means of an umbrella. This chestnut formed one of a number in a certain famous grove not far from Vienna. He was dressed in the very height of fashion—as exquisitely as if he were going to a ball for the first time with his bride: he seemed scarcely able to stand for fear of soiling his boots, and there was an evident dread lest a drop of rain should spoil the sleek gloss of his coat. He had a pistol in his right hand.

You see Louis had not gone with Carlotta into Styria. When he met Carlotta at Venice by appointment in that cool, off-hand, matter-of-fact, modern style, there was a sense of intense self-complacency. He looked upon her much as an old Roman general might have looked upon the captive of his bow and spear,

reserved to adorn his triumph. His heart swelled with vanity and conceit as he glanced over her with a critical eye.

Yes, she was faultlessly dressed, not a doubt of that. Those who are *à la mode* in London too often let themselves become dowdy and flat so soon as the Continent receives them, or else fly into the other extreme and flare like hollyhocks.

Carlotta was an artist in dress. She could bear it for one thing. She was a species of canvas, which could be painted on as deeply as you liked; you could not lay it on too thick. She could bear it all. What would have sunk other women she carried off with conscious ease. Not a colour she could wear, not a tint she could choose, but heightened the effect of her own singular and striking beauty. But then she had good taste, and never chose anything *outré*. Artists in these things know very well that the real dress lies in the fit and in the trimmings; the material, the ground-work is only of secondary importance. Louis recognised in a moment the fact that he carried with him a woman who could not be concealed;

she would be safe to have a crowd round her. This was just what he wanted. People would envy him, wonder at his fortune, and think what a devilish clever scamp that Fontenoy was. And so the foreigners did—for a time at all events, till they understood the man. Neville Brandon had a curious theory about the moon and the sun, and in short the whole solar system. It was grounded on the doctrine of the conservation of energy or force. The force that carries a bullet along in the air at an enormous speed is not lost when the ball finally reaches the earth; it is only transmitted to something else, and there stored up.

So, said Neville, this great sun of ours has been 'burning, baking, broiling us' for some few trifling millions of years, but it is quite certain that it cannot go on so for ever, and that it has not been going on so all through half eternity. His idea was that, of the heat given out by the sun, the earth and all the planets were gradually absorbing a part, and so growing hotter and hotter, like a ball of iron before a bright fire, while meantime the sun grew cooler and cooler. In the end the sun would

be exhausted, and grow cold and habitable; while at the same time the earth and the planets would become glowing suns, and return to the original sun the heat and light absorbed from it during myriads of centuries.

There was nothing particular to support this idea beyond the prophecy that the earth should become a burning mass; and the fact that the heat had already risen up as near to the surface as half a mile. Neville had no serious faith in this suggestion, still he threw it out. Louis had no knowledge of astronomy, but he had an idea that if the multitude admired and fêted Carlotta till she became a sun, some part at least of the force thus generated would be transmitted to him. While she grew more and more notorious in Vienna, and people admired and crowded about her, Louis smiled with the utmost complacency, and metaphorically patted himself on the back. But after a time—it took a long time to do this, he was so crusted over with conceit—he began to have uneasy feelings that he was left very much in the shade. This canker grew in his mind, and fed upon his life, till he became

ridiculously restless. His first idea was that after all perhaps people did not know who he was, and what relation he bore to Carlotta. Perhaps he did not appear in her company sufficiently; he had left her to herself too much. To remedy this, he accompanied Carlotta everywhere, much to her ill-concealed contempt, but somehow or other he was passed over. Louis sulked, and even growled. With her sweetest smiles Carlotta asked what was the matter. He got up and went out. These were the first symptoms that set Carlotta upon her guard, and made her anxious to secure a friend. Still time went on, and nothing materially changed. Louis lived pretty much as he had always done, and there was no open quarrel. But there was a gap, a tiny crevice between them. He began to grow tired of her—that was the long and short of the matter. It was all very well for a time, while the novelty of mischief was in it. But when he came to have her always at hand, always easily accessible—when the difficulty of meeting, and artifices and concealments, were no longer needed—then there gradually ensued a

flatness, a dull tameness—just the very thing he detested most of all. However, he managed to pass the time away through the winter, gambling a great deal. He fancied himself, as the phrase is, at gambling. In the low saloons of America and Europe he had learned every trick and dodge that the ingenuity of man had contrived with the object of cheating; and some of these were so extremely clever that not even the watchful eyes of the spectators in the Viennese saloons could detect them. For Louis, though in no want of money, did not hesitate to put in practice these cunning little plans, not only out of the pleasure of winning, but because he really revelled in the enjoyment of making hatfuls of money. But at last intoxicated with success he lost his head. He left écarté, and such games where human skill is of some avail, and where the very charm of the game consists in the perpetual struggle of the intellect against Chance, and attempted to carry the roulette-table. Here there was no opportunity to cheat—at least not on the players' side—it was all blind chance, and he was as much in the dark as any one. But possessed

with the true gaming mania he went eagerly to work to stump the proprietors of the table, utterly regardless of the repeated losses he sustained. His theory was that the sitting gamester sweeps the board, a maxim which soon bid fair to ruin him, as it has ruined scores of others. Fellows lose a note or two, and then double, till it makes a good sum, and then say, 'O, we can't retreat; we will go on, in time our luck must change.' So they keep on till all is lost. The only way to win is to rise and leave the game the moment one begins to lose—an apparent paradox. Put it in practice if ever you take to play, and don't be sneered or laughed out of it, nor even bullied.

Louis kept on till he lost the whole of the money he had previously won, and made serious inroads in the sum he had brought with him. Excited as he was, however, he had quite sufficient steadiness of mind left not to ruin himself. He did at last leave off and look round him. He reckoned up his finances; he had two or three hundred left, a mere nothing. But he must curtail his expenses. Carlotta was an expensive article.

The mean wretch left out of sight the fact that he had not spent a pound upon her. She knew better than to come to him for money. Louis, however, was now in a reflective mind; and he began to think over many things. What had he gained by this wild freak, as he called it to himself? They did not make much of him in Vienna—quite the other way. He was tired of Carlotta's style of beauty, he wanted a change. He had anticipated much envy and much congratulation from the English acquaintances whom he met in the saloons. But no such thing. They rather shunned him. They did not refuse to acknowledge his presence; but they sidled away as soon as possible, and left him to himself. Not a word was said about his glorious exploit. There was a dead silence on that. The fact was it fell flat. They did not like it—it revolted them. They were a free-and-easy lot, none too strict in their morals. If he had run away with any other woman but his own wife's sister they would have laughed and joked, and crowded round him, and swore it was the best lark out. But this form of dissipation disgusted them. It was

out of their code; it was a cold-blooded piece of wickedness, for which they had no taste. They avoided him, though they sought Carlotta. This stung Louis to the quick. As a matter of course, instead of casting the blame where it was justly due—*i. e.* on himself—he threw it all on Carlotta. She had led him into it—he actually grew virtuously indignant with her—*he!* Not that he ever said a word to her, but he sulked and avoided her. Latterly a new subject had occupied his mind—this money. He had learnt by his correspondence in England that Carlotta had no 100,000*l.* to fall back upon. Horton's solicitors had let that fact be known; it soon got into the clubs; from the clubs it reached Louis. He did not know how much money she had brought with her, nor how much her diamonds were worth; but this he was certain of, that let her plunder be ever so great it would not last long at the rate she had been going. To compete with archduchesses and head a faction in the State is no light matter. He marked her expenditure—noted it for six weeks in his quiet sardonic way. What was she to do when all her

money was gone? *He* should not keep her, that was certain. Altogether Louis made up his mind to be rid of her at the first favourable opportunity. So when Carlotta went into Styria on pretence of her health (trying above all things to hide from him the real cause, which she knew would set him against her more than anything else), he shrugged his shoulders and said he should remain in Vienna. Very well, said Carlotta; so they parted somewhere about the latter end of January, after about nine weeks of each other's company. When she had gone, Louis felt rather dull for a while. Though he had ceased to care for her, yet she had been something to occupy his mind. He felt the want of it. He did not care to return to England yet. He was thoroughly disgusted with all Carlotta's fine schemes of getting him divorced from Heloise. No step whatever had been taken in that matter, nor ever would be, said Louis to himself, with one of his hateful sneers. 'She may hate me, and rail at me, but a woman thinks twice before she gives up a man. How eager they all are to marry!' He

had very little money, that was another reason why he did not care to go back yet; life would be intolerable in London without plenty of cash. Here he could dawdle about at all events; so he dawdled about. Dawdling about with Louis meant penetrating into all the odd corners—all the dustholes of humanity. He ferreted his way through the burrows that the thieves and vagabonds had bored for themselves underneath the fair structures of the rare old Austrian capital. Some of these he had been in before. Others were new to him. Meantime an Avenger was on his track.

When Carlotta's note reached him, Victor was stupefied. He could not believe his eyesight, still less comprehend that all this was true, and not some trick played off upon him. He rushed to her house; she was out. This struck a chill into him. He rambled about near her mansion all day—he was too restless to go in and wait—calling at intervals, but always meeting with the same answer—'My lady is out.' She was out all next day, and the next, and the next. A growing convic-

tion sprang up in his mind that the note was literally true, and that she had really gone. Then he saw the paragraph in the papers announcing the flight of Carlotta with Louis. He raged, and boiled with hatred, jealousy, and excitement. Yet even then he did not blame or doubt *her*. It was all Louis's doings. He read his note again, and the sense dawned on him that he was disinherited—cast off—reduced to a poor paltry three hundred a year; he who had always looked upon himself as the heir of millions, and had planned out his life accordingly. Who could have betrayed him? Without a doubt it was Louis. His love for Carlotta actually increased now that she had covered herself with infamy. Till then there had been a certain amount of reluctance, a secret sense of guiltiness even in his wildest moods. Now that was gone; she had flung herself open, made herself fair game, and he, the hunter, threw himself with added ardour into the chase. To Venice, eh—she had gone to Venice? To Venice went Victor. He searched high and low, but found no Carlotta. He made inquiries by the aid

of the police, and ascertained one fact at last —that no such person existed in that city. Where then could she have gone? Paris was his first idea; but he reflected that Horton was there. Then Florence, Rome, Brussels, Berlin, and so on. He had no reason to suppose that she was in either of these places; still he would make sure. He determined to search them all. He began with Florence; then Rome and Naples, so to Sicily, and then back again to Switzerland. This took up eight or nine weeks. Finally, on his way to Berlin, he called at Vienna. By this time he began to feel what it was to be 'reduced to the ranks.' His money ran short; he had barely ten pounds left. Thus it was that he could not prosecute his inquiries in the royal way he had hitherto done. All he could do was to post himself in the frequented places and watch. This he did, and once Carlotta passed within a few feet of him, and he saw her not; for the simple reason that he did not look for her in that guise. She was rolling along in a grand equipage with a lady whom he had previously heard was the wife of an ambassa-

dor. Victor never dreamt of Carlotta's going out openly into the world. He felt sure she was living in retirement. So he passed over the ambassador's carriage without a glance. 'The eyes see what they come to see,' as the old maxim goes; and he had not come prepared to see her in this position. For a whole fortnight he watched and waited—in vain; Carlotta had departed for Styria at the end of the first week. His money was now fast disappearing, though he half starved himself and slept 'rough' till he had a wild and haggard appearance, still his clothes were those of a gentleman. He had reached his two last napoleons when he saw Louis. Wild with rage, he rushed after him, followed him up the steps of a clubhouse, pushed past the waiter, overtook Louis in the midst of a saloon crowded with gentlemen, and first tapped him on the shoulder till he turned round, and then felled him to the ground with one blow. If he had taken his time, and been cool, he would have aimed at the face; but he struck out wildly, blindly, and hit Louis on the breast. The force of it threw him off his balance; but

he was not hurt or stunned. He sprang up instantly, but before Victor could renew his assault the gentlemen present had crowded round and interfered. Victor was too furious to explain himself; the one word his parched lips could articulate was 'Carlotta!'

At this Louis faintly sneered, and some of those present looked at each other. It was plainly a case for a duel.

Victor hearing that fatal word snapped at it, 'Yes, yes, there must be a duel.'

Louis turned pale, and looked from one side to another to see if there was no way of escape. Then he began to cast doubts upon Victor's position, a mere nameless vagrant. But this the spectators would by no means allow. Victor was well dressed, and he had the unmistakable air of a gentleman.

'Very well,' said Louis, with affected composure, 'let it be at once, then—this hour.'

'This hour!' cried the aggressor.

Louis asked for a second. At this there was an awkward pause. They did not like him. At last a Russian gentleman stepped forward. Victor had to choose between

several, for they pressed their services on him. They knew nothing of the cause of the quarrel, but the popular feeling was against Louis. He had already bitterly repented his affected indifference. The cabriolets were at the door; only two could be got, and as it was raining hard, no one cared to go on foot or horseback, especially as the evening was closing in, and there was every evidence of a stormy night. Victor insisted upon walking to the scene of action beside the cabriolet in which his second rode. The second remonstrated with him—told him the jar of walking would unsettle his nerves. Victor was in a burning heat and fever, and he would not get out of the cooling rain. Thus he reached the chestnut grove perfectly saturated.

Louis, meantime, had reflected. He recovered himself a little. From so mad a fellow as this little danger need be apprehended. All he had to do was to aggravate Victor and make him lose his head; he would be sure to miss. Louis, like a true coward, had made pistol-shooting a study; he thought it made him safe, and he really was a splendid

shot in a gallery. But this was a different matter. Still he recalled to his memory, as he drove along, the feats he had performed, the fingers he had shot off gloves, and the aces he had spotted on cards. He arranged his tie, ran his fingers through his hair, curled his moustache, and tried to gain courage by cultivating his natural conceit. He wanted to appear diabolically cool, and thus to shake Victor's nerves. When they arrived, he cried out that it would be much more pleasant to sit in the dry and be shot; suppose they drew up the cabriolets ten paces distant, flung open the doors, and fired at each other thus? Victor, who wanted to kill his man, utterly refused. Louis had to get out; but he secured an umbrella, and insisted upon being allowed to hold that over his head at all events. So the dandy duellist stepped daintily down and picked his way across under a chestnut tree, and then posed himself, declaring that he really could not stand anywhere else. Victor's second strongly objected to Louis holding an umbrella; but Louis would not give it up, and Victor did not care a button. This point

granted, Louis's hopes rose a little, for the lower part of the handle of this umbrella was made of metal, and so was the curve of the handle, and he calculated he should be able to so place it as to possibly intercept a ball speeding on its way to his heart, for he fired from his hip and not with outstretched arm. Victor, on whom all these minutiæ had been totally lost, waited in a species of stupor to receive his pistol. At that moment his thoughts were far, far away. Through the drenching rain, through the thick grove, he saw a form of beauty, a shape which had stolen his heart. He was full of Carlotta, dreaming of that fatal woman, when they placed the pistol in his hand.

So the nephew of the fallen wife stood opposite the seducer, armed with deadly weapon, waiting the word to kill. 'Fire!'

As Victor's second had anticipated, the umbrella disturbed his principal's aim. Unconsciously it attracted his sight. His ball was too high—it drilled a hole through the silk umbrella. Louis's first shot missed entirely.

'Aim low,' whispered the second, as he

placed another pistol in his hand—'aim at his legs.'

Victor did so, and a wild fierce pleasure rose in his head as he glanced along the barrel; this time he felt sure. His ears strained themselves to catch the first letter of the signal word. It came—he pulled the trigger.

Louis, with a violent effort, had regained still more his equanimity; he wound himself up to the highest pitch, and resolved to wait till Victor had fired, and then take a steady aim.

Victor pulled the trigger; there was a snap as the hammer struck the cap, but no explosion; one drop of rain had damped the ill-made foreign cap. Louis's nerves, strung to the highest pitch, heard that sharp click, and in a moment divined that the pistol had missed fire; and in that same moment, too, so inconceivably rapid is the glance of thought, he foresaw that if he did not fire at once he should have to wait in suspense and dread till the pistol was reloaded. His finger pressed the trigger almost simultaneously with the click of Victor's hammer, and while the seconds were in the very act to rush forward.

There was a spurt of flame hissing through the rain, a little heavy smoke, and a form fell with a thud upon the earth and dashed up the mud and the water. They ran to him—all who were there. But they did not touch him. A horror fell upon them. There was a round red spot in his forehead. He was dead. The ball had gone straight to the brain.

As if with one consent they made for the cabriolets, and hurried off. As they neared Vienna Louis began to grow conceited with his skill, and asked if he had not made a good shot. There was no reply—it grated upon them.

On the eve of the very day that Georgiana and Neville Brandon were married (after their own fashion) a still and silent form lay upon its back, staring up at the black louring sky with glaring lustreless eyes in the far-away Austrian wood. The raindrops fell upon those eyes, yet they did not shrink or close. The subtle essence which gave the clay its power to feel had fled.

Louis had escaped the Avenger this time; but had he not piled up still another rock to fall upon him in the hereafter?

CHAPTER IX.

The very absence of all the society that had so recently enlivened Avonbourne tended to make Pierce fall back upon Noel, and scarcely a day passed when he was not at the Bourne Manor-house. Heloise was not often visible; she still shunned him; but he was not disheartened thereby, for he had already learnt, so quick is the mind to discover what it longs to find, that the more emotion she felt towards him, the more she would try to hide it. He remembered the cold touch of her hand in the arched doorway—that very coldness, the perceptible tremour, the rapid withdrawal, all informed him that if her heart was not his, at least he had made some way with her. Else why should she touch his hand at all—they had seen each other before that day—why did her taper fingers involuntarily meet his? The blood rushed to his temple; wild hopes surged

through him. He grew bolder, and only wanted an opportunity to take steps of which till now he had not even dreamed. In love the heart is a most sensitive thermometer; the faintest encouragement, and the mercury rises to an altogether disproportionate height, or on the other hand falls as low. The difficulty was to find an opportunity. Noel only saw her at intervals, and then in the presence of Pierce, or some third person; never by any chance alone. For a time he bore this with tolerable equanimity, calm in the belief that if watched for an opening must at last occur; but when weeks lengthened out, and early spring came, his ancient restlessness returned. They were hunting hard and fast now. The sharp frosts had gone, the horses could jump without fear of breaking their legs, and the scent laid beautifully in the damp dewy mornings. The southerly wind and the cloudy sky brightened up the last few weeks of a dull and disheartening season. Therefore they made the most of it. The Duke's hounds met every day almost without exception, now here, now there, leaving no spot untried, and all this

enthusiasm led to some very splendid runs being achieved. Noel was a bold rider; he had ridden in more dangerous chases than these; and Pierce, passionately fond of the sport, old as he was, he missed no meet; his gray head, his beaming face full of health and a subdued species of joviality, was to be seen day by day amongst the crowd of horsemen—ever welcomed heartily and cordially, if not loudly. They thought him an honour to the hunt. Noel made no friends among them. He bowed distantly, nor sought any man. He never volunteered a remark; he answered, and that was all. There seemed nothing genial about him; and his dark swarthy face, with the somewhat stern mouth and glittering eye, was barely English. They did not take to him kindly. It was not long either before they envied him, not only his superb horses, his reckless boldness, but above all things his wondrous good luck. Go at what he would—timber, stone, or fence, water or what not—it was the same. He never fell. This was an unpardonable offence. If as a novice he had rolled over and crushed a hound or two, or

broke some one else's leg, it would have been forgiven, for every one would have had a kind of fellow-feeling; all had fallen in their time, all might fall again. But this unfamiliar good fortune—this inviolability, as it seemed, from accident—made an unfavourable impression. It was a reproach to them. It was as much as to say, 'I am not of thine order;' and the disdainful manner of the man added not a little to the general discontent. They would have given hundreds to see him roll in the dirt. There was even a sort of ill-defined conspiracy among them to unseat him if possible. When he appeared the hounds were taken to the worst and most impracticable country. This, however, they soon abandoned, for it did not upset him, but it materially damaged many of the others. If a chance occurred by which any of them could have cannoned Noel into a deep lime or chalk pit, not one would have missed it. Noel was unconscious of all this. Really and at heart he was the reverse of being ungenial. He was fond of the company of sportsmen and of men of action; he was ready to drink a glass, to

join in any game; but at this time he was full of a passion which absorbed him. The motion, the excitement, the danger of the chase only seemed to more eagerly inflame him. Heloise was his only thought as they raced over the pasture or waited at the corner of the wood. The very freeness, the open frank character of the sport tended to develop his feelings, to bring them out of their retreat, to strengthen them. Action invariably makes a man bolder, more determined, less thoughtful and anticipative of obstacles. When he was speeding along at headlong pace, with the breeze fanning his face, the hounds crying in front, and the blast of the horn echoing from the hills, Noel gave the rein to his imagination and his passion. He seemed as if he were galloping to her arms, as if she beckoned him on. Absorbed in this one great passion he was careless of the people amongst whom he moved; excepting always Pierce. Pierce could not understand the evident dislike shown by the hunt to Noel. He saw it, and wondered at it. To him Noel was invariably attentive, courteous, ready to forward his

views either for pleasure or in more serious matters. Why, then, should the rest so obviously avoid him? It pained good-natured, simple-minded Pierce.

Never once did he suspect that Noel entertained the slightest feeling towards Heloise; how should he? They were never together; they neither played, nor sang, nor rode, nor in any way sought each other's company. The very absence of Heloise from the room argued an utter indifference to his guest; and so blind was Pierce, that once or twice he hinted to her that it was uncourteous, and that she should show him a little more respect.

Noel grew more and more restless—less companionable. It was a hard task to him now even to make himself agreeable to Pierce. The old man was busy now with an idea that had often occurred to him, but which he had never attempted to put into execution: it was to form a garden entirely of wild flowers. He was passionately fond of them—he had been so all his life—and the thought had often occurred to him how sweetly pretty

they would look, and what pleasure he might feel in having a garden completely occupied with them alone. It was difficult to discover their retreats at any other time than in the spring—it was hardly late enough yet; but he busied himself with the foundation of the scheme. He built a rocky mound for the ferns, and beside it a pile of great logs and roots and stumps of trees, in which the tree-ferns and mosses and the parasites might find a congenial soil. These he erected where some tall elms overshadowed the gardens, so that they might be sheltered from the heat, and grow in the coolness and the damp. Then he prepared a piece of ground for the plants delighting in a sandy soil, and another strip full of chalk and rubble, and a third he laid down with the thymy turf from the downs. The idea, as he worked at it, gradually grew upon him, and he ceased to hunt so continuously, and Noel went alone.

But just at this time an interruption occurred. There came a letter in a blue envelope one morning, addressed to Pierce, in the unmistakable handwriting of a soli-

citor. He opened it, and an exclamation of astonishment burst from his lips. Heloise glanced up from her coffee with a look of inquiry.

'Lord Henry is dead!'

'Indeed!'

'The Lestrange estates come to us now.'

This was how it was: Pierce Lestrange, of Bourne Manor, Avonbourne, was the representative and head of the younger branch of the family—called younger by mere heraldic etiquette, for it had been a distinct family for fully two hundred years. The elder branch, which had taken the major part of the possessions of the original founders, and had added very largely to them by intermarriages with heiresses, had entirely separated from the younger, and, as often happens, in the course of generations a void had sprung up between them. They neither visited nor in any way spoke of each other except as utter strangers. This Henry Lord Lestrange was the last of the elder branch, and he had never married. Since, however, the families had so long been separated, the idea of à possible

reversion to him or his heirs had never occurred to Pierce. Henry Lestrange had been a physician—that is, nominally. He learnt the profession, not as a means of gaining money, of which he had plenty, but out of intense love of science. He practised a little—he studied more; he was, moreover, a man of the most original genius. Thus it was that he chanced to cure a patient—his own guest—who was a cabinet minister. Two years afterwards he was made a peer. This was how the title came to be his.

Not even after he had carefully read and re-read the solicitor's long letter, and satisfied himself that he was in all reality not only the possessor of a vast estate, but also a nobleman; not even after he had explained it all to wondering Heloise, could he realise that it was a fact. He, Pierce, who had all his life been a simple country gentleman, of moderate estate only, holding no position, asserting no claim to grandeur, had in a moment ascended in the social scale almost as high as was possible. Though so recently created, the title gave some social precedence. Then

there was the property, the vast acreage, the enormous rent-roll, the numerous tenantry,—these conferred an importance which could not be ignored. And all these had fallen to an old man busied with making a garden of simple wild flowers. It was days before he could realise the new position he occupied. Had there been any necessity for his attending Lord Henry's funeral, had he been obliged to be present at the opening of the deeds, or anything of that kind, it would have been brought home to his mind; but it so happened that the dead man had left particular instructions that Pierce, if possible, was to be kept in utter ignorance till after he was buried. So it was that Pierce, who rarely read a newspaper, and never the list of deaths, knew nothing of the matter till a fortnight after the physician was consigned to his tomb. There was no need for him to hurry away to these new possessions in a distant county, to assert his right or take formal possession; there was no dispute, no cavil—it was his. But he did not hasten to seize it. Now that the truth had come home to him, now that

people drove up daily to congratulate him, Lord Lestrange (he had given strict injunctions that no one of his household should use the title, from which he shrank) was not altogether elated; in fact, he felt depressed. His was not a mind to quarrel with the decrees of Heaven; but as he cast his gaze backwards along the course of his life, he could not but remember the many unfulfilled aspirations—the desire to travel, the natural longing to see other climes; and still more than this, the ideas that had occurred to him, the great and glorious things he could have done, if only this Power—this money—had been his when he was young and full of life and vigour, untrammelled by the iron chains of age and habit and accumulated circumstances. It was a melancholy and depressing thought—one that he could not shake off at once; so that he did not hasten to seize his good fortune, but rather lingered and shrank from it. Had not this happened he might have died contented, but it awoke vain regrets even in his peaceful and well-ordered mind.

About a week after this Heloise came

rushing into his study, to ask if he had thought of Ella.

'Of whom?' said Pierce, evidently quite in the dark.

'Of Ella. Don't you remember Lord Henry's protégée—the slight girl we saw with him once at the railway-station? O, papa, you must do something for her. She will be homeless; perhaps she has gone already. I ought to have remembered her before.'

And Heloise grew hot and flushed with the thought of her carelessness. Pierce was shocked at his own inhumanity. He wrote at once, and despatched it by one of his servants, who was instructed to proceed express by railway—that would be quicker than the post. They waited eagerly for the reply; it came at last, late in the evening of the following day. These were the words, written in a thin peculiar hand, very slightly flourished, not unlike the angular manuscript in the registers and documents of the seventeenth century:

'Dear Lord Lestrange,—I have to thank

you most sincerely for your kind and thoughtful letter, but I feel obliged to decline your invitation. My late friend and patron has happily provided for me amply, and, with every respect, I prefer to lead a life of independence. Lord Henry purchased me an annuity of 250*l.* some time previously to his demise; and he did more—he educated me in an art from which I am enabled to draw a considerable income. It is my intention to travel on the Continent. I leave here immediately, and I must request your forgiveness for my neglect to quit before.—I am, with the deepest respect, yours very faithfully,

'Ella Furnivale.'

'And she is hardly twenty-one,' said Heloise. 'I never read such a letter—so independent, so off-hand. This art—it is painting; I remember something of a picture of hers in the Royal Academy. To travel on the Continent alone at her age! The old doctor has given her some of his queer notions; don't you think so?'

'Most probably; still I do not blame her

for wishing to feel independent. I am glad Lord Henry left it in her power to be so. Perhaps we may even yet be of some assistance to her, dear.'

So Ella passed out of sight, and Pierce began to think at last of visiting his new estates. Heloise begged him to take her with him; she dreaded so much being left alone with Noel. Pierce readily consented, and the day was fixed for their journey. 'La femme propose, et l'homme dispose'—a man interfered and upset the whole matter.

It was the last day of the season: the meet was crowded. Pierce had delayed his departure on purpose to be present on the occasion. The Duke himself was out. The fox broke cover well, and raced away, as it happened, for the downs. Now this, though it seemed the very best thing that could happen at first, since everybody could follow where there were no hedges or ditches, yet soon turned out the very reverse; for the brute went straight away like an arrow, and the incessant hills pumped the horses, especially as they had to cross miles of arable

land. The fox ran steadily on; such a run had been rarely known, but the chase thinned as rapidly. In two hours there were but seven in the field, amongst whom were the Duke, who had changed horses once already, the huntsman, who had done the same, and Noel. About half an hour more disposed of the other five, and left Noel and the huntsman alone, speeding along the springy down with a fierce rivalry; for it was obvious that the fox could hold out but little longer; his brush drooped and swept the grass, and he had swerved from the direct course, and was now making a sweep to the right, evidently in search of the vale and of a friendly copse. Noel had a general idea that the valley lay on the right, but he had no knowledge of the locality; he guided his course therefore partly by the hounds, and partly by the motion of the scarlet jacket on his left. It seemed to him that scarlet jacket was making a long detour to the left, and in the wild desire to forge to the front—to be alone, the first—Noel gave way to his own impression, and wheeling a little to the right, sought to cut off a

corner by galloping through a field of beans. His weary horse urged its way heavily through the beans, snorting and plunging along, flecked with foam and with a drooping head.

Noel, looking over his left shoulder to watch scarlet jacket, was not so much on the look-out as he should have been; so that it came on him like a horrible and frightful apparition,—a snort and a sudden rearing of his horse as the animal tried to stop itself, and rose up almost upright upon its hind legs.

The fore feet, where were they? Reaching right over a precipice!

In that moment of intense sensation Noel saw the distant vale, the trees and woods, the pasture-fields, the dim horizon, towns and villages and church-towers, blue smoke from the hamlets, windmills revolving—a panorama of landscapes.

It rushed up to meet him, he knew not how; the air rushed by his ears—he felt as if he was taking a tremendous leap. Then there was a jar, a shock, a sharp pain, and

unconsciousness. And all this had occupied barely a second.

The chalk cliff fell twenty feet sheer from the edge of the field, and he had galloped right over it. Then at the bottom of the cliff there was a ledge, along which a narrow road wound; below this a deep 'combe,' or steep down, dropped another hundred feet, steep as the roof of a house.

The horse fell on its legs on this road, and the legs instantly snapped up under it like icicles, and the animal came down on its belly; but that saved Noel, else the hard road must have brained him on the spot. He rolled off senseless, and lay in a rut. The horse raised its head and writhed in agony. That writhe overbalanced it, for it was on the edge of the road, and over it fell and rolled with fearful velocity down the steep and slippery combe fully a hundred feet, crash through a hedge at the bottom, and there lay still as a stone, and all in a heap—dead.

In after days a loving heart that came to that spot to see it, and to realise the horrible danger, grew angry, and even thirsted for

revenge; for why had not the huntsman, the man in the scarlet jacket, shouted and warned him? Instinct told her that it was jealousy —hatred of a bolder rider and a better steed —the outcome of that general feeling against Noel.

The senseless body, jolted about for an hour and a half in a cart without springs, came to Bourne Manor just as the bell rang for dinner. Heloise, coming down the staircase, looked out of the window as she passed, and saw what made her heart stand still—a cart coming up the drive, where no carts ever came, with a black heap in it. At first she thought it was Pierce, for he had returned while she was dressing unknown to her. Then she heard Pierce at the foot of the stairs asking if Noel had returned; then she fell, too, senseless on the landing, for it shot through her like a bullet. It was Noel in the cart, and he was—dead, or he would not lie so still, heaped up in that ghastly way.

They put him on a bed, and they sent for doctors in post-haste. Thus it was that Pierce did not go to visit his estates as soon

as he had arranged; thus it was that when he did go, a week later—for the solicitors urged him to—he left Heloise behind to see to their unfortunate guest.

CHAPTER X.

What shifts, what ingenious contrivances and innumerable excuses Heloise invented to be near and with Noel as he lay maimed and agonised, and at times insensible, upon his bed! That is at first, for she imagined all the household were watching her; but after a time her mind grew accustomed to it, and she entered his room boldly and openly as a matter of right, as the mistress of the mansion looking after her guest, as a matron too, and not to be deterred by any ideas of false delicacy. Who could analyse her heart, as she sat by that bedside, and say which most predominated — love or dread; dread lest he should never recover? For there were days when he seemed infinitely worse, and beyond the skill of man or the renovating powers of nature. Yet sometimes a secret pleasure stole through Heloise's mind—that she might now

look at him, watch him, tend him, be something of service to him, without fear, openly. So great was the delight in serving him, in ever so small a degree, that it at intervals overcame even her fear, and made her happy. Then there were relapses of doubt and uncertainty; but it was always Noel, always. Her mind was occupied and bent upon him, to the total exclusion of everything and everybody else. Her love lit up the chamber, and made it a holy place. Yet, you will say, it was an unholy and wicked love. That may be; nevertheless it was love of the deepest, intensest kind—an almost *maternal* love—and it did fill the chamber with a presence that soothed everything, even the irritable nerves of the sufferer. This love dignified everything. Even what was repulsive in the sick chamber became sacred and beautiful under her touch. But her greatest delight of all was to watch him; to sit in the great window-sill, with the monotonous sound of the driving spring rain beating against the panes, and pretend to read a novel which was lying upon her knee. Her eyes were not on him, and yet she could see

him, feel him, and she knew by instinct whether he slept or turned, if his eyes were open or closed. It gave her a peaceful slumberous sensation; she seemed as if in this sick chamber she had at last found a haven of rest. Here her heart was quiet; no doubts, no torturing suspicions, no questionings of conscience; nothing but peace, quiet, rest. It was slumberous, it was happy; and this while she was wild at times, maddened with alternate hopes and fears, as Noel's state varied.

His most dangerous state was only just beginning. His arm had been broken in the very place where it had pained him so long, just where it had imperfectly joined again after the matchlock bullet smashed it years ago. The bone had cracked there like a pipe-stem —snapped across instantly. He was bruised and shaken; but the worst part was his head. A flint had lain on the road where he fell, and had it not been for his hat his skull would have been crushed in much as a spoon dashes through an egg-shell. As it happened, the hat intervened between the skull and the stone, and deadened the blow. But it was a terrible

place, not only from the gash and the bruise, but from the horrible aspect it had, as if it was indented, as the side of a teapot might be. Heloise's heart grew sick when she saw this; it acted upon her like violent medicine; she nearly fainted again. But she only saw it once; entering the room by mistake, when the doctor was there examining the wound. She had to lean against the wall when she got outside. This flint had done the mischief. There was a stupidity about the patient. He seemed dazed when he awoke, or rather when he opened his eyes he appeared to be still asleep; the brain was in a state of torpor. He could recognise no one; he only uttered an inarticulate noise when he tried to speak. That strange gurgling sound went straight to Heloise's heart. Her blood stood still in the veins, her face paled, her knees trembled. Yet she would not quit her post—always by the window, waiting.

Noel remembered nothing after that moment when he saw the landscape rise up towards him, as it seemed, in a violent convulsion of nature. All from that moment was a blank,

till he slowly struggled back into consciousness about eight days after they laid him on the bed at Bourne Manor. His physical organisation had been awake, so to speak, long before that. The heart had beaten, the veins had flowed with blood, the pulse had throbbed, the lungs had inspired, the very eyes had opened. The material part was alive. But the mind was dead. He was not conscious that his heart was beating, or his lungs inspiring. It was like a deep sleep. At last came the painful awakening. It resembled the dawning of the morning.

Noel had a faint *feeling* of light; such a feeling as the partially blind have; he saw a dim grey twilight—as we see a greyness indicative of the coming dawn, early in the morning after the cocks have crowed the second time. For a while this was all; all his consciousness was in his head. His soul seemed to be there alone; he was not conscious that he had a body; his soul was confined to that spot. But in time he grew to feel the pain of his arm, the ache of the setting bone, the sharp twinge, as he moved in a

helpless way, like one walking in the thick darkness. This was the first indication he had that he still retained a body; at least, it would have been the first indication if he could have thought and reasoned; but he did not think. He had no power of thought. He did not say, 'This is light; this is pain.' He did not recognise it; but he felt it. But after a while there shot up to his shoulder the sharp twinge of the broken arm; and then, for the first time, he regained his consciousness. The light grew brighter, and, as it were all in a minute, he *knew* where he was. There was Heloise sitting in the window-seat. He gazed at her dreamily; he longed for her to turn and look at him; he eagerly desired her to come and sit near him. Yet he did not attempt to speak; the memory that he had such a power as the power of speech did not occur to him.

Presently the nurse came and moved his wounded arm, and a sharp twinge forced a low cry from his lips. Then he regained speech, and said faintly: 'Heloise.' She came to him instantly, and hung over him,

her face beaming, her lips quivering. He was better, he would recover, he had spoken; and his first word was her name. It set her heart in a glow. Almost involuntarily she laid her hand on his forehead. She had been sitting so long in the window that she had grown cold; her hand was cool and refreshing. Then, too, for the first time, Noel was aware of the intense heat which seemed to surround him. The coolness of her hand supplied the contrast—just as people who have been blind cannot judge of distance till they have found a fulcrum, some fixed spot, and learn how to correct the sight by the mental powers. He moved uneasily; but he did not moan or cry out now. He had recovered his consciousness; he would not moan in the deepest pain. It was only when he was unconscious that he cried out. Now his mind had returned, he subdued it. The moan only came when the physical organisation alone existed; directly the mind came into play all the old instincts of courage and fortitude returned. Even the touch of her hand could not keep him still, now that he was conscious

of the intense heat. It grew on him ; the atmosphere of the room seemed to be made of *wool*, so to say, through which no air could pass. He was in a high fever, in fact. He would have rolled from side to side ; but the pain of the wounded arm stopped him. He had to remain still in one place till that spot grew intolerable. How shall any one describe the horrors of fever ? That night was a period of unutterable torture. The feeble glimmer of the night-lights lit up what seemed to his distempered vision a hellish apartment used by the Inquisition. They were killing him by heat. The air was rarefied and heated till it took away from him the power to breathe ; the atmosphere weighed upon him, laid on his breast as if it was a lump of ponderous lead. The ceiling pressed it down ; the whole weight of the house was on him. The clothes suffocated him, they clung to him, and stopped up every pore in his skin. Now his head swelled, till it felt like an enormous vacuum—a vast globe, filling the whole bed, and his soul and mind and sensation a mere tiny speck within it ; and then it fell in ; and a horrible

sense of crushing came upon him, as if his head was placed between two boards, and pressed together till the bones of the skull bent. His eyes ached, as if they had been open for weeks without closing. His hands felt large, puffed up, as if the blood would burst through the veins. He could not keep his feet still; they fidgeted perpetually. Then came a feeling as if his eyes would start out of his head. In vain he tried to sleep. His mind was at work now; and he recollected that probably if he could sleep he should be better; he should escape this awful heat. What he must do was to lie still, and close his eyes till slumber came. He tried this; he kept still till he felt he should be smothered; then he moved again, and all his work was at an end. Forgetfulness would not come. And thus it went on, all through the dreary hours of the night. Still the same horrible oppressing heat—a heat which nothing could cool. He was better in the daytime; but the nights were an ever-increasing misery to him. He slept a little in the daytime, a restless, *surface* sleep, waking at the least sound; an unre-

freshing sleep. He thought that, perhaps, this made it more difficult to slumber at night. To avoid this he resolved not to sleep in the day; but it was of no use. He was ten times more restless than ever. And Heloise? He saw her, but he did not think of her; this heat occupied his whole being.

And so it went on, till the extreme prostration reduced him to utter speechlessness; and the doctor whispered that he must die. Noel that afternoon was lying as peaceful as if he was already dead. He lay on his side, with his face towards the window, still, silent, motionless; gazing, as it seemed, in dreamy abstraction at the light. Heloise sat and watched him. This peacefulness was terrible to her. It was as if he had given up the struggle, as if he had succumbed, and battled no more for life. The love that was in her rose up, and would not be denied.

The nurse was about to get a little refreshment; she looked round the room stealthily, and stole slowly across to Noel. He did not appear to see her come; there was no light in his eye, no change in the face, no motion, no

variation from that trance-like state. She bent down, and fondled his hand; she bent lower, and her tears fell on his face; still lower, till she kissed him on his lips. Then she started back, not with guilt, as it seemed, but as if amazed. Had she really heard aright? Had *he* spoken? Was it really a low, almost inaudible whisper that had reached her ear? The words were these, or seemed to be these:

'Air, air, or I die.'

She bent her head down close again, and listened. Yes, it was true; he spoke; he whose voice had not been heard for four days, how weak, how low it was now! Heloise, wild with excitement, ran for the nurse, and begged her to assist in carrying him to the window.

'Window, ma'am?' said that stolid creature. 'Why, the doctor ordered he should be kept from draughts; to catch cold would kill him.'

She would not do it. Heloise frantically tried to drag the bed along. The nurse calmly sat on it; and Heloise could not move her

weight. Heloise rushed out of the room, with her hands clasped, her eyes dilated, wild, to find some one to assist her. At the foot of the stairs she met Pierce. She had telegraphed for him so soon as Noel was in danger. More by gesture than by words she made him understand, and begged him to assist her. Pierce looked grave, graver still when the nurse said, that if it was done *she* should leave the room; it should not be on her responsibility.

'Whoever heard of moving a man to a window, and him only just out of a blazing fever, and a-dying?'

'Dying, you wretch!' screamed Heloise, ready to kill her for uttering the ominous word. 'He's not dying! O papa, papa, do help; come, listen to him!'

And she dragged Pierce to the bed, and made him lean down, and listen at Noel's lips. Sure enough, that was what the injured man begged for, repeating it slowly and constantly, with his eyes towards the light. Pierce hesitated. Heloise seized the bed, to pull at it.

'Stay,' said Pierce; 'at any rate it cannot hurt him to put the window open.'

Heloise had it wide in a minute. A draught of cool air, fresh from passing over April pastures, rushed into the room, fanning the patient's pale brow. His lips opened, his eyes glistened; there was an expression in his face. He seemed to drink it in. They left the window so for half an hour. Then Heloise seized Pierce's arm, and pointed, with terror in her eyes. Noel's eyes were closed; his chin had fallen; she deemed him dead. Pierce went to him, felt his side. The heart beat very, very faintly. Just then the doctor came; he looked at the patient, laid his hand on his mouth, and beckoned them to come out of the room. Heloise obeyed, ready to sink, believing that Noel was passing away from her. Once outside, the doctor shut the door.

'He is asleep,' he said. 'He will live.'

On her knees that night Heloise thanked the Almighty. Her tears flowed abundantly; she bowed her head, even to the dust, in intense gratitude. For a fortnight—while Noel was in the balance—she had not prayed; her

heart was too dry. Now she praised and acknowledged the Power that had saved him, and asked forgiveness for her neglect to kneel before.

Was it wicked of her to praise for *his* life? If it was, she could not help it.

CHAPTER XI.

The warm breath of spring and the genial sunshine have almost the power of the 'spirit moving on the face of the waters'—brooding till the barren chaos grew instinct with life. The dark green mosses are full of tiny insects hastening hither and thither through this to them enormous forest, and the blades of grass are bent down with the weight of creatures trying to crawl up into the sunshine. The trees are awake—they have not only opened their eyes, the buds, but have put forth their bright green leaves. How many shades of green there are! Even this tall oak, not yet in full leaf, has a tinge of a bronzy green in its coppery boughs.

Noel and Heloise were walking slowly upon the sward in the sunny morning. The tall pine-trees on their left emitted a resinous odour, sweet and spicy, scenting the warm

air, and high up in their branches the squirrels leapt, and hid themselves behind the trunk. The ground beneath these pines was barren, covered with millions upon millions of brown leaflets—spiky leaflets—slowly decaying, and killing all vegetation in those shady recesses: so that by stooping they could see along the level earth far on among the trunks, and watch the rabbits running to and fro, and here and there a pheasant making a stately retreat. There is something exquisitely beautiful about a fir-tree. It rises up so straight and high, each branch sloping downwards, and diminishing in regular proportion—shorter and less sloping as the top is neared. They are beautiful, graceful trees, to my eye far superior to any other that grows on English ground. There is a mysticism about them: they seem to typify something, though it is hard to define what, unless the cones are taken in the Assyrian sense as the symbol of the power of nature—that recuperative, renovating power which even at that moment was working in Noel's limbs, bringing back to him little by little the old strength. He still

walked with a stick, leaning on it heavily, but his face had lost its sickly pallor. It was not yet as brown and healthy as of old; but there was a glow on it—the glow of the air, the sunlight—the reflection of the morning. Never in all the course of his life had he felt so entirely peaceful—so much at rest—so calm—and so happy. There was much in this of the returning vigour, but more still in the presence of Heloise. They spoke rarely, and then on the most trifling topics, as they sauntered slowly on, but there was a feeling between them. This illness had done it. All the barriers were broken down. They did not attempt to conceal what they felt from themselves nor from each other. They knew by instinct that each was aware of the other's passion. Not a word passed—no demonstration, no reference; but as they walked together beside the pinewood, breathing the scented air, they felt that their love was mutual, full, and overflowing. So it was that they spoke rarely, and then on indifferent matters, for love is silent. Nominally they were at work for Pierce—searching out wild

flowers, ferns, and mosses, to adorn his garden of Nature as he called it; his garden of wild flowers only. In truth they were searching out the wild flowers—the graceful ferns of passion, filling their garden with beauty, and colour, and odour. Noel's eyes dwelt almost always upon Heloise. Heloise rarely looked at him—her gaze was upon the trees, the grass, and the sky. These had been to her of old time her lovers—these too she had wooed. Wooed the sun, whose ardour in return burnt her cheek; wooed the wind, who in return filled her with grace and lively ease of motion. But in all these—in the sun, and sky, and breeze, in the lofty rolling downs, in the deep shadow of the forest—there was still a something wanting, and as she had gazed upon them, and drunk in their unutterable meanings, she sighed, she knew not why. Now she knew: with Noel, her enjoyment in nature, in the trees, and the sunlight, reached its highest and most exquisite pitch. She felt with them. Felt with the fir-tree and the chestnut the delight of springing into life—the pleasure of putting forth the green bud,

and watching it expand into the perfect leaf —itself a marvel of beauty of design—just as the mother watches her child grow and develop in size and proportion. Felt with the sun his warm, genial love of the earth and its living things, and with the sky its brooding beauty. It hung over the earth—a blue dome, painted here and there by the hand of a divine Michael Angelo, with flecks of graceful cloud floating along, the thistledown of heaven. The sun was the window in this grand dome, through which the light of the upper ether streamed in upon the earth. She could feel with the squirrel on the topmost boughs of the fir-tree—she could enter into his pleasure, and enjoy with him the sway, the gentle swinging motion of the delicate branches yielding to the breeze. Whatever living creature, be it plant or flower, animal or insect, on which her eyes rested, her soul seemed to enter into its existence, and she felt with and understood it. This delicate faculty of perception, this exquisitely sensitive organisation, which is the attribute of the true poet, gave her an intense but indescribable delight. It was as if

her own enjoyment of the sunlight and the spring were multiplied a hundredfold—as if her own identity were divided into innumerable portions, each an 'I,' each basking in the sunshine. She did not attempt to communicate these feelings to Noel. Heloise was a poet by nature, but a poet to whom expression was denied. Hers was the plastic nature, the delicate and sensitive organisation, upon which the words of the singer acted as the breeze upon the fir-tree bough, swaying it hither and thither, putting it into graceful motion. Her soul rippled up like water before the wind, and glittered with innumerable points of light reflected from the sun. But she could not speak—could not originate these impulses. She was a passive poet. Her being was that of a harp played upon by nature, emitting the softest, most enchanting sound, but originating nothing in itself. She could not play upon herself. So she was silent.

Noel felt none of these refined pleasures; the glow of returning health, the strength that stole through his veins and along his limbs, with the delight of watching

her face,—this was enough for him. It was indeed a face to watch. Be not too harsh—do not judge her too severely—this artless poet-child, who never could be in equity dealt with as others should be. Noel watched her face, as she had watched his when he lay helpless in pain. Slowly there grew upon his mind a sense that he could not understand her. The radiance upon her countenance came from he knew not where; the emotions that were reflected there were not such as he had known —they came from no source of which he had the key. They flowed up from a well at which he had never drunk. A superstitious feeling, almost reverential, took possession of him: he felt as though he had been walking by the side of an immortal, of one of those divine beings which in the old time came down to mortals, and brought with them an indefinable Presence. His feelings towards her underwent a change. He had looked upon her as a child, as something weaker, lower than himself—something to be protected and watched over. Now it dawned upon him that she was in reality higher and

more divine than he was—that she could watch over and protect him. His was the lower existence. So he came to watch her motions almost with reverence, as if her step was holy, as if her face shone with divine light, and a halo went about her. Heloise knew but one thing—that she was happy. It was like this that they searched for the wild flowers: or rather Heloise did, pointing them out to Noel, showing him their beauties and their graces, teaching him their names and histories. For these wild flowers have a history. The orchids and splendid aristocrats of the greenhouse and conservatory are like the vast plains of America, the steppes of Russia, the boundless plains of Australia—they are beautiful, but they have no history. There is no human interest about them. But Greece—that small territory, only half a dozen parishes in comparison with the continents—has for us a charm and an enduring beauty because of its human interest; because of the passions and the subtlety, the wars and the hatreds, and all the circle of man's joys and griefs, hopes and fears, that were there enacted in

their unrestrained fulness. And so our wild flowers of the copse, the meadows, and the downs have about each and all of them a human aroma—an odour of the Past. They have with them the associations from our childhood, when we played amongst them, gathered them by multitudes in sport. They bring with them strange tales of centuries since, when knights wore them on their helmets, when ladies rode a-hawking over them. They have a history, or rather a mythology, of their own. Pierce's instructions were that they should not disdain the humblest—not even the buttercup and the daisy—and he wanted, too, the very grasses, each and all. Noel, whose life had been spent in violence and in motion, marvelled at the infinite variety of the life that he had trampled under his feet and disdainfully passed away from. In one day—one single walk—Heloise gathered, or rather took up root and all, no less than five-and-thirty varieties of common grass. These Noel carried in a basket provided for that purpose. Heloise said there were nearly sixty different grasses; but they had much more diffi-

culty after the thirty-five. Some of them had not yet come up; others only grew in distant spots; all were hard to find. But it was of the flowers that Heloise told him most—of the monkish legends, the strange old superstitions of the days gone by, all of which Pierce had taught her in childhood. Day by day the garden grew; and day by day the love that was in them grew stronger and stronger.

Noel was at Knoylelands now, but he rode over every day, usually before lunch, and stayed there till late in the evening. Even then he could barely tear himself away. Frequently he walked, in order that after he had left the mansion he might still linger near, watching for the light in her window. His favourite spot was away from the highway. He left this, and went in among the fields, and made a circuit till he stood near the edge of the garden under a great oak-tree. There he leant against the trunk—the sturdy iron-bound trunk—with its thick bark and gray lichens. Overhead the innumerable stars shone down, glittering through the spaces between the branches. In the south a great

planet glowed like a ball of molten silver till it paled as the full moon slowly rose over the downs, casting a huge shadow of the oak-tree on the damp grass. Lines of light clouds lingered in the sky towards the east, rippled like the sand at the edge of a pool where the tiny wavelets break, but these were rippled with the yellow light of the moon. The grass at his feet glistened and glittered with emeralds, the dew-drops reflecting the moonlight. Bourne Manor was in the shadow of the downs, dark and solemn, save and excepting the southern gable, where the light fell, bringing it out into sharp relief. Far on the left of this, and lower down, there shone out one pale lamp—paled by the curtain—and this Noel knew as Heloise's chamber. She had chosen years ago this room, because its great window faced the south and let in the sun and the light, which to her were as meat and drink.

How should Noel, the rude and violent soldier, the traveller, the *travailleur* over many deserts—how should he, the man of action, analyse his thoughts and feelings? How

could he tell the names of the passions, and their varying phases, as they surged through his breast? He could have no more separated and defined them than he could have translated into human language the moan of the waves as they broke upon the beach. But those passions, those changes and phases, did surge through him. He knew not how he spoke it; but so it was at last.

Where the nut-tree hedges met in a green angle; where a great chestnut-tree reared over them its candelabra of blossoms; where the bracken grew luxuriously in the unseen ditch—unseen because filled with brambles and with ferns—where the sunlight came softly, and the breeze was still—this was where it was done, where their fatal words were spoken. They were sitting on the sward—on the soft moss—sitting so still and so silent that the mice peeped out of their tiny burrows, and ran about among the grass, darting hither and thither. A rabbit came to the mouth of his cave, and sat there in wonder, gazing at them out of his full black eyes. A pair of wild doves came into the chestnut-tree,

and softly cooed at intervals. A great blackbird with his 'tawny bill' splashed himself in a rill not three yards from their feet, and then sat on a bough, and plumed his feathers, and uttered his loud and defiant cry. The shy kingfisher flew over them on his way to his nest—a flying rainbow, glittering with crimson and blue—a streak of azure passing across the sight, as if he had been bathing in the sky. They were so still and silent, so peaceful, that all nature saw it; all these tiny creatures, these mice, and rabbit, and doves, and shy kingfisher, saw that it was a truce, that they had nothing to fear, for these human beings were in accord with them. But in the full glare of the sunlight, when it fell on the bare sandy mound of the hedge behind them—out of sight, yet there—lay coiled up a green and spotted snake, basking in the heat.

Noel knew not how his arm came round her. She lay in his arms, as if asleep—unresisting, still, only he could feel the heaving of her bosom, the throbbing of her heart. Her ripe rich lips were a little open; he gazed at them; he drew near; he fastened upon

them. They did not move; they did not avoid him. Another, and yet another. As the mice and the doves were unconscious of them, so they grew unconscious of the sun and the sky; unconscious of all but the thrill of unutterable love. The subtle fire ran through them; their souls grew as one. Her breath came in long deep gasps, till at last her lips dropped from his, her head bowed, and she buried it in his breast, hiding away her face. There he held her, gently stroking down the lovely hair, whose curling tendrils clung to his fingers.

The shadows moved. The spaces of light and the spaces of darkness, or the lack of light, the shadow of the interlaced branches of the chesnut-tree, moved round and farther out into the field, till the hot beams of the early summer sun showered down upon them. Still they moved not, spoke not. Only she clung to him—he bent over her. The sunbeams glistened on her glossy hair. She held his hand—not the one that strayed among her hair, but the other—and her lips were wandering over it, he could feel her warm breath

upon it. The shadows moved. The topmost branches of a tall pine-tree intercepted the rays of the sun, and the shadows fell across them once more. Still they moved not, spoke not. He saw and felt nothing but her; she felt him only. That sense of each other was all; and it was enough; more would have been pain. The shadows moved. One streak of sunlight lit up the lower extremity of her hair. One arm was thrown out—the sleeve had got drawn up—and the soft white skin shone like marble in the sunlight. Then he became conscious of a warm stream trickling down his hand—his hand that she had kissed. It was her tears. That woke him—then he spoke. Hurriedly, passionately, in low piercing tones that stirred her very soul. He was pleading—she could not answer—pleading with her to go with him away, away, no matter where, but ever into the sunshine. She listened and answered not; till suddenly she started away from him, and rose up and turned to go; and, silently rebuked, he followed her.

But the fatal words had been spoken; the fatal seed sown, the idea implanted. Hence-

forth this desire to go forth with him was ever in her heart.

The snake which had crawled out into the grass came to the spot where they had sat, and crushed it down, and there coiled himself up in the full glare of the sunlight, for the shadows had moved again.

CHAPTER XII.

While Noel and Heloise were rapt in that long embrace beneath the horse-chestnut tree in its wealth of blossoms, another pair were wandering side by side, but not hand in hand, in the Bois de la Cambre, Brussels. They had passed beyond the limit of civilisation, wandered beyond the laid-out drives and walks notified to the visitors as *allée*, *chaussée*, on the direction-posts; they had got away from the sham lakes, from the noise of wheels and the laughter of the gay pleasure-seekers; away, too, from the corks and broken bottles of the British tourist. The smooth drives had vanished behind them; they had gone in among the beeches. The path was barely wide enough for them to walk side by side—a mere green track strewn with the beech-mast of the previous autumn, entangled at times with the long shoots thrown out by the

briers, whose young prickles had not yet had time to harden. The thick roofing of leaves was impervious to the sun, and they walked in a crypt of shadow; but the warmth of the spring penetrated into the deep forest, and surrounded them with its genial glow. The beech trunks rose up on either hand, smooth and round, dotted here and there with broad bands of gray lichen, and clothed at the foot with green moss. Their boughs met overhead, forming a pointed arch, which extended as far as the eye could see, till the effect of perspective lessened its distinctness, and the path seemed to lose itself in a wall of leaves which receded as they advanced. There was not a sound; the wind was still, and not a branch creaked nor a leaf rustled. No sportive rabbit crossed their path, no bird chattered in the recesses of the wood. Slowly they walked on—on—into the depth of the gloomy shadow, till the path split into two, the one diverging at an angle from the other, and each overarched in the same way with meeting beech branches. At the very spot of the divergence there was a broken trunk.

A great beech had grown unsound and rotten within, and the blast of the winter storms had twisted it off—snapped it about ten feet from the ground—and the dead trunk lay across the path on the left hand, with its boughs crushed beneath it. The stem stood upright, gaunt and ragged at the top, where a huge splinter pointed at the sky. But the parasites, the green mosses, and the tree-ferns had found their rooting-place already where the tree had been rotten within, and long creepers were winding their way about the branches of the fallen trunk. There the gaunt stem stood, a sentinel in the way, challenging all who passed. Here there was an opening in the leaf-roof caused by the fall of this giant —this pillar of the blue dome of the sky—and the sunlight fell full upon the upright stem, bringing it out into bright relief. Beyond it the two pathways branched off—caves of dark shadow—going no one knew how deep into the wood. There was a streak of blue sky overhead, and the earth was covered with moss.

Ella paused here, and took from her com-

panion her sketching materials. He stretched himself on the ground and began to study a book from his pocket, while she drew and studied the beauty of the scene before her till it was photographed in her mind. This was Ella Furnivale, the late Lord Lestrange's protégée; this, on the grass, was her friend Claudius Lovel—neither her husband, her lover, nor her brother, but her friend.

Carelessly walking through the wood, Ella's hair had caught in a brier; the hooks of the branch held tight in the convoluted folds, and down it came, and away rolled one frisette, while another hung in the air. Down, too, fell her own beautiful hair, far down to her very waist in ripples of pale gold, till her face seemed like a portrait set in a gilded frame. Even Ella was not exempt entirely from the short-sightedness of her sex. To roll up and twist and conceal such a wealth of beauty, to cover it with plaited bundles of false hair, filthy stuff taken from no one knows where or from what head,—what madness, what insanity! These bundles of false rubbish, these disgusting pads, are not only bad in

themselves (possibly even dangerous, despite all the precautions taken in their manufacture), but they kill and destroy the natural covering of the head. Young ladies at five-and-twenty complain that their heads are growing bald, that the hair splits at the end and will not grow, cut it as often as they may. The comb each morning drags out a handful of hair, which they look upon with dismay; for each morning diminishes the already scanty stock, and no new springs up to supply its place. Then they rush off to the chemist, or the barber, who recommends some patent renovator, some marvellous balm and oil of Heaven knows what, which will produce a crop that Absalom might envy. The chemist knows better than this; but it is his interest to push the sale, for the profits are tremendous, the demand ever increasing; for the more that is used the more will be wanted, for the simple reason that these oils and balms kill what little life still remains in the hair of the foolish virgin who uses them. For the hair is alive; it is a living growing thing—a plant, if you please; it is a tube, as most of you

know in these days, of course. All young ladies have seen a microscope; they have seen a hair magnified; they know it is a tube —a plant—with its roots, its sap and juices, its exuding oil, but it never occurs to them to apply this knowledge. This is the great fault of our days. Our forefathers had but few facts to build upon, but they studied these facts and applied them till they had exhausted their uses. But we, with a wealth, an almost illimitable ocean of facts, pass them by, throw them aside without a thought into a dustbin—it's only a microscope, only a magnified hair, a matter for a moment's wonder, a mere show got up for our amusement. Depend upon it, its Creator did not get that slender and delicate tube up for mere show, as a toy to look at in the microscope, as a fashionable amusement to while away a moment of *ennui* while the ices were being brought or the champagne uncorked. It is a real living thing, having its birth, its life, and its death—as much a living thing as the human being is that bears it about with her. But why describe the physiological structure

of what is familiar to every fashionable young lady? This is how they treat this living creature the hair, the most delicate and sensitive of plants. They comb it; so far so good, provided the comb does not rake hard at the roots, and *start* them, if not pull them up. You may do as much harm by pulling a flower half out of the flower-pot, and kill it quite as quickly, as if you had taken it clean up. So they comb at it, drag at it impatiently, dragging out scores, *starting* scores more, snapping off scores additional. Then the brush. This does little harm if moderately used, and not one of those horrid patent things warranted to mesmerise or what not. Now comes the torture. Tie it up, twist it up, plait it up, bundle it up, crush it up, squeeze it up, screw it, wind it, thump it, drag it, force it down by every unnatural means, till it occupies the least possible space; in fact, get it out of the way, conceal it in corners anywhere, make a mere groundwork and foundation of it to bear the weight of fashion's superstructure. Build up on it great masses of a warm thick substance—pads, horsehair,

Heaven knows what, smelling not exactly nasty, but *close*—through which no air or light could possibly penetrate; bind over these plaits of false hair, cut from the heads of dirty German peasant women, cut perhaps from the heads of the dead and dying in the foreign lazar-houses and hospitals — a stuff that has been subjected to blasts of hot air in order to do what? *to kill the germs of insect life* that cling to it. They may be dead, these germs, but they are there still, or at least thousands of them were there. These delicate creatures, these sensitive ladies, could not rest in a bed which was reported to contain a single—no matter what; if they rest in a strange bedroom, no matter how respectable, they must sprinkle it with spirits of camphor as a charm which no insect can pass. Yet they can contentedly bear about with them the whole day long piles of hair to which even now innumerable germs of life may be clinging, to which such germs certainly *did* cling not so very long ago. Having thus most carefully covered over and hidden the original hair, and replaced it by a mere human contrivance;

having, in fact, put on a wig—yes, an absolute downright wig, the equivalent, if not in shape, in effect, of the disgusting things our grandmothers used to wear; having done this, they fasten it down with iron nails, with hair-pins artfully disposed and out of sight, but there by dozens. A fashionable lady can easily dispose of three dozen hair-pins—long strong pieces of iron wire on her head, no light weight, these, in themselves. Many of these stick almost in the skin of the head; others at first only just touch it, but by degrees, by the pressure of the bonnet, they work down till the sharp points dig in, and then each motion of the head sways them to and fro and scrapes the skin till it is most exquisite torture, and it grows red and inflamed. All the while *she* bears a smiling face, and walks erect and proudly. This horrible parody of the Creator's natural covering for the head is put on at a comparatively early hour; it is kept on never less than twelve hours, often much longer, and never once removed or eased in any way. Now what is the effect of all this? The hair is a plant, at least

it may be called a plant for the convenience of illustration. Now what do plants want first of all? Why, air and light. These thousands upon thousands of tiny tubes, these delicate organisms called *hair*, thus treated, thus covered, never know what the impact of air or light is from one year's end to another. The next thing a plant wants is room to grow and expand, to put forth tendrils and extend itself. If you covered up a geranium with a door-mat, could you expect it to flourish? If you twisted twenty fuchsias together and tied them with tight bands, and held them down with chafing iron pins, could you expect them to bear blossom, and to charm your visitors with their graceful shape? In one word, the hair is smothered—suffocated. It is like making a man lie in bed for ever, thickly padded down with blankets and mattresses, unable to turn or stretch his legs. What a pale emaciated creature he would be at the end of the year—if he survived so long! And so it is with the hair: it dies by thousands, it comes out by handfuls; then in order to encourage nature, when the young lady

grows alarmed, she carefully sets to work to prevent its renovating power from replacing the dead tubes. This she does by washing it with oils and balms, which is about the same as pouring scalding water on grass with the idea of making it grow. These oils, &c., stop up all the pores of the skin; literally plug them. Suppose a gardener sowed seeds, and then carefully covered the earth over with a layer of plaster-of-Paris. Some ladies' heads are sheer surfaces of raw red skin in consequence of this treatment, this suffocation, this deprivation of air and light, this check to all perspiration, this torture from prodding hairpins. It is at night, when the pads and frisettes and the three dozen hairpins—the half-pound of iron—are removed, that the smart is acknowledged, and 'O, my head is so sore; my head is so hot!' is the order of the hour. How many headaches may be traced to this cause, for which anxious mammas are drenching the poor patient's stomach with pill and powder! When the night does come, and the miserable hair is let free to wander away, and breathe if it can, then what do they do?

Not a few damp the top of the head with a sponge, under the impression that that will make the hair grow. If it does any good at all, it is simply in cooling the inflamed skin; but that effect is gone in five minutes; and it is questionable if the heat of the head drying up the water may not be unhealthy. This is an outline of the Hair Fetish.

Even Ella was not entirely superior to this weakness of the feminine mind, this singular fetish worship. Is it a remnant of the old by-gone ages, when the dwellers on the earth, the primeval men and women, the aborigines, worshipped sticks and stones and odd bits of rubbish, as the natives of Africa, the co-existents with the baboon, do at this day? Has the tradition lingered with the weaker sex longer than with the men? Without a fetish no woman can exist. Yet Ella had no need of any assistance from art; and she knew it well. She knew that she had splendid hair —hair which hundreds of women would have envied her for; yet she buried it, hid it out of sight under her pads and rubbish—under her fetish.

Claudius, walking behind her, raised his stick, and struck the frisette hanging from the brier far away high up out of reach; he kicked another that fell upon the ground into the nettles, while the hairpins went in a shower among the moss. Ella smiled, lifted her hat, and shook her hair about her shoulders, till it surrounded her like a golden cloud.

'Paint your hair,' said Claudius; 'if you can, you will make your fortune, for you will paint sunlight.'

She did not blush at this remark; she did not resent his rude destruction of her materials, but walked on as before. Was this childishness, was it high-bred ease or familiarity? Not the last, certainly, but a mixture of the first two. They were always together, yet never familiar. I use that word in its worst sense. Their ideas were familiar to each other, indeed; their persons, their ways were not. Claudius watched her as she went before him with admiration, unmistakable admiration; but it was calm, cool, critical, as he might look at a picture in the Royal Academy; and she, turning round and

meeting his gaze, did not blush or even smile, but was as calm, as unmoved as he was. She was very lovely. A slender figure, hardly up to the usual height, not *embonpoint* enough for the Venus; slender and graceful, with the gracefulness of a child. Her face was a delicate oval, a low forehead, rather broad at the temples, but not in any way what is called intellectual or high. (How I hate a high, so-called 'intellectual forehead' in woman! It is unnatural, looks strained.) Her brow was smooth as polished marble, without a line, without a wrinkle. The eyebrows were narrow, distinct, and finely arched, the eyes deep blue, fringed with long eyelashes; but these not being black did not show so much as might have been desired. Her nose was straight and delicate; her lips perfectly cut, but rather cold, not full or red enough for passion. Her hands were small, taper, finer than even handsome women's hands usually are, and exquisitely white. They seemed made for the brush and the pencil; true artist hands. She looked more a child than a woman, dressed in that pale-blue silk, with the masses of golden

hair flowing over her shoulders. Yet she was twenty-one. This was the dead Lord Lestrange's pupil and protégée. He was but just dead, yet she was in colours. She owed him everything, but she did not look unhappy; and still with all the colours of her dress, and the smile upon her face, she did not forget him. She was wandering in a Belgian forest with a man, a very young man too, who was neither her husband, her lover, her brother; who was only a friend. But he was *her* friend; and that was a distinction with a difference.

Claudius read while she sketched; it was a book upon architecture, and he did not raise his eyes from the page to watch her as a lover would have done. He grew so absorbed in the mental reconstruction of the ruined temple described that he started when she called to him to come and look at her drawing. Even then he did not come till he had made some notes in his pocket-book and inserted a marker in the page he was reading. Then he went to her, leaned over, and looked long and steadily at the sketch, comparing it with the original—with the gaunt and broken stem be-

fore him. Very politely, but distinctly, in a cool tone of voice, he pointed out a slight defect here and there. In one spot the shadow was too deep, in another the leaf of a plant large in the foreground, though drawn minutely correctly, was turned the wrong way—a way in which nature could never place it. Generally, he said, he found the same fault with it as with all her work; it evinced too much study of detail, too little general appreciation. Ella listened to him in the same calm, almost languid manner. Then she defended herself as logically as if disputing in the Schools. There was no pout upon her lips, no angry spot on her cheek, no disappointment in her countenance, as there would have been had they been lovers. She did not resent the unfavourable criticism; she set to work to controvert it. Details were necessary; how were the inimitable masterpieces of nature—the forests, the hills, the landscapes, even the vast waves of ocean—produced except by the collection of innumerable details, each perfect in itself, and so building up a superb whole?

Claudius objected that the artist had something more to do than to merely copy nature, as it were, word for word. To him the canvas looked flat, and the picture flat as the canvas, unless there was an idea behind the colours. Then the idea carried away the mind, and the paint was paint no longer, but reality. Without the idea the mind saw the paint as paint, and flat; when it received the idea it cast a glamour over it, and the picture lived. Now this idea could never be produced by the most minute attention to detail; it could not be copied from nature; it must come from the artist's own mind, must originate with him, and be transferred, put, as it were, into nature. Landseer's pictures, for instance, were 'paintings,' rude, anything but well painted; but the idea carried away the mind, filled it with glamour, and his pictures lived, even without colour, as was shown by the popularity of engravings from them. This was the magic charm of the marvellous Doré, as distinguished from the stern minute realisation of Holman Hunt. Doré was rude, rough, almost grotesque in his *manner;* he

never worked out the details, but his pictures were instinct with Mind, with Idea, and with Life ; so that the coarse lines, the incomplete outlines, the *hardness* of the sketch passed unheeded, the glamour of the idea entered the soul of the beholder and filled him with the feeling of the artist. This was the true artist; in this power Ella was deficient, or at least she had not cultivated it.

Ella listened to every word and bowed her head once or twice in acquiescence; then silently put up her materials, bound up her hair, and they slowly returned into the city. In the Place Royale they shook hands calmly, as acquaintances would. Ella passed on to the Hôtel de France, Claudius to the Hôtel de Belle Vue, each to their separate *table-d'hôte.* Ella had said in her reply to Pierce that she intended to travel on the Continent, and this was how she commenced it.

CHAPTER XIII.

The old coach for Waterloo came 'tootling' and rattling through the Place Royale early on the bright May morning. Ella and Claudius had taken places over night. They were not rich enough to have a carriage to themselves, and to drive through the lovely beech avenues of the forest of Soignies, pausing when they pleased to admire the scenery. Ella had the 250*l.* per annum long since made over to her by her patron; but that was not much to travel on, even when supplemented by the 200*l.* she had realised by her first picture in the Academy, and carefully preserved for this very purpose. Claudius had something more than this. His mother had left him her own fortune, between 300*l.* and 400*l.* per year from land; he had expectations, remote, but large. An entailed estate, held by an uncle, must of necessity fall to him, provided he lived long enough, provided too no heir intervened, for the uncle was seventy-two and infirm. From

this source, at present, he received nothing; for the old man hated the boy as only a narrow-minded old man can hate, and refused so much as to see him. This too was not much to travel on, and Claudius, not so fortunate as Ella or so clever, had not yet been able to supplement his income by the exercise of his profession. Nominally, Claudius was an architect; in truth, he was a sculptor. Hence they endeavoured to practise economy as far as possible; instead of hiring a carriage from the well-known agent in the Montagne de la Cour, and viewing the field of Waterloo in luxurious ease, they were perched up high on the coach top, among the motley assembly who daily traverse the space between Brussels and the famous plain. They rattled on over the hard stony road, stones which no amount of passing wheels can ever wear smooth, with a beech wood on one side and an open country on the other. The beech wood was partly dead or dying, and the gaunt trees looked as if the 'dun hot blast of war' had only blown over them a week ago. Past direction-posts and branching lanes, directing

the traveller to '*ville* Louise' or '*ville*' this and '*ville*' that; through villages where the men stood smoking in blue blouses and wooden shoes at the doors, and where the girls, great grown-up girls, ran after the coach chattering, and tucking their gowns between their knees turned somersaults, to be rewarded by coppers and nickel from the coach-top, flung by grinning boobies, who encouraged the miserable wretches in this sorry exhibition of clumsiness and immodesty. Out again into the broad road and past a dog-cart—a literal dog-cart, drawn by a large, but not very large, dog of a tawny colour, patiently plodding on with a heavy load of potatoes, and his master singing in the rear, totally oblivious of coach and everything else. Ella wanted to sketch the dog-cart, the first that she had seen, but the motion of the coach would not permit her. On again—But why go over the well-known route? A motley group they were on the plain of Waterloo. There was a Russian, a Yankee, two ladies from Australia, a French gentleman, our two English, and a sullen Spaniard. The lion on the top of the monu-

ment spoiled all in Claudius's idea—such a monstrosity had been rarely seen out of a London square. They parted again the same evening at five, to their separate dinners. They met again at eight and visited the Théâtre de la Monnaie, to be first charmed with *Robert le Diable*, and then disgusted with the ballet-dancers among the tombs by moonlight, meant, no doubt, for fairies and spirits, but much too 'leggy.' They parted again at eleven, for their hotels; always meeting and taking leave, just as two friends might; never the faintest show of demonstration—no gentle pressure of the hand, no lingering glance, no half-suppressed sigh—but in the most commonplace manner. Yet they were by no means a commonplace pair, and they were working out a great problem—a problem in which society was deeply interested—all unconscious to themselves.

Henry, Lord Lestrange, was worse than eccentric, his neighbours said. A man who resided constantly on his own estate, yet never shot or hunted or fished or gave parties, could not be estimable in their idea. As

he neither went to church nor paid the voluntary church-rate, nor subscribed to the voluntary school-rate, nor in any way countenanced parish schemes of relief, of course the clergyman and his two curates were dead against him. They feared he was an infidel; they were deeply concerned. The parson himself, backed by his parishioners, paid the peer a visit. The peer, who was sitting at a late breakfast with a young lady pouring out his coffee, and who did not trouble to rise, asked the parson what he had come for. Says the parson, out of courtesy, good-will, and what not. Says the physician-peer, that he wanted neither courtesy, good-will, nor what not. If the parson came for subscriptions, he might go at once ; if he came to play a game at billiards, he might stop. The parson bowed and left in high dudgeon, and described the physician as rude, boorish, an atheist, a gambler, and a man of loose morals ; all because he refused to be intruded upon; because he spoke of billiards, and had a young lady at breakfast with him; he, an unmarried man, and no aunt or chaperone in the house.

This young lady was Ella Furnivale. The physician, in his pre-peerage days, had been called in by an old friend at the confinement of his wife. The mother died; the physician only saved the child by the exercise of all his skill and constant attention; then the old friend died, and Lestrange took the child and bred it up; at first in sheer charity, for there was no money; then out of curiosity to see how it would turn out; lastly, out of love. Not the love of the sexes, not the passion or the sentiment of a man for a woman, but the love of a parent for his daughter. For Lestrange, who was over sixty and had no children, grew to look upon Ella as his daughter, and had intended to make her his heiress, so far as was in his power. The estate he knew must go to Pierce, but he had a large amount of personal property; this he had intended for Ella, and he had actually during his lifetime settled an annuity on her; but he delayed making his will, as men even of the highest intellectual calibre will delay it, till too late. A strange education Ella had received at his hands. The primary part of it, the very

foundation and groundwork, was a contempt so deep as to amount to positive indifference for the opinions or the remarks of society. She imbibed from him a calm determination to do what she thought fit without the slightest concealment, without the slightest ostentation, let it be never so opposed to the general custom—let it be the greatest sin of all, the sin against conformity. Lestrange substituted for the judgment of society the judgment of her own soul. He taught her to watch not the tone of other persons' rude and often thoughtless and unmeaning conversation, but to perceive the slightest warning in the delicate balance of her own mind and soul. Of the one she was to take no notice ; of the other she was to be the devoted servant. This man, who repulsed the parson, yet sneered at and reviled the men of modern science—at the great anatomist (no matter what his name) who proved to his own satisfaction that the *thing* (save the mark!) called a soul had no separate existence from the body ; and at the still greater man who discovered that matter was the origin of all things, and God, if there

was a God, was a sort of vapoury mystery, an *ignis fatuus* playing over a vast infinity of bog. For, said Lestrange, the two greatest discoveries ever made by the mind of man were these: the existence of God and the immortality of the human soul. These two had been discovered by man after ages—ay, thousands upon thousands of years—of the darkness which reigned when the Neanderthal skull was the type of the then race of man. By degrees the conception and finally the definition of a God was arrived at, and also by similar steps the immortality of the soul. These two greatest discoveries they were now trying to disown—*they*, the men of science, who should be engaged in making further inquiries. He hated them all, he resisted them all, he hardly knew which most—the scientific fools *who denied their own existence*, or the so-called ministers of heaven who denied the right of the soul to aspire beyond a certain fixed limit, fixed by their narrow minds and exploded traditions. Lestrange's great dogma, the faith of the man, was the Human Soul. The body, said he, has been trained since the

world began ; trained to endurance, to labour and fatigue; trained to be useful in a thousand ways; and the result of this training is handed down from generation to generation, till the result is called an instinct. The mind has been at work too for these last six or eight thousand years at all events, a proof of which is that we possess a *written* history for that period. Philosophers have examined into the method of the mind, and we have systems of logic, codes of deduction and synthesis, determinate canons of analysis. But the Soul, the grandest, the highest, the noblest, has never yet received attention. What little attention it has got has been by fits and starts, by spurts, and after each of these it was neglected for another thousand years or so, till another great soul-expounder, called a prophet, made his appearance upon the earth. But these spurts gave no real progress ; only just preserved the soul from relapsing into utter ignorance. For the soul, like the mind and body, was ignorant in itself and required to be taught, and the first step towards that teaching was an analysis of itself. Lestrange,

in fact, wished to found a science of the soul; not a so-called psychological science of mesmeric and magnetic and psychic force, and so forth, but a science of the higher instincts, the higher perceptions and aspirations, which we perceive by the abstract soul. With this view he had shut himself up in retirement to study his own soul. This he had done day by day for forty years, never wearying, ever urged on by increasing pleasure in the pursuit, ever finding greater mysteries, greater beauties. All these he had noted down in his memoranda; carefully written out in a plain handwriting, plainly expressed. A record indeed was this! A forty years' history of the soul! It was only a man living by himself, in silence and solitude, possessed of an immense power of self-concentration, who could accomplish such a work. He shrank from publishing it, as he naturally might, during his lifetime; but he had made arrangements for its issue two years after his decease.

In Ella he had seen early indications of an artistic spirit, of high aspirations, of an ethereal nature, little clogged, if at all, with earthly or

animal passions. He had chosen her to be the living exponent of his faith, and he had trained her up in it from the earliest youth. For this purpose it was necessary that she should be almost constantly with him, and in fact she never attended a girls' school, or had a governess, from the age of twelve. She was always with him, ever listening, ever imbibing. He taught her all; not by books or lessons, but by conversation, down even to the method of interpreting the Assyrian inscriptions; for he was a man of varied learning and boundless reading. But above all things, he showed her how to listen to the promptings of the soul within her; to distinguish between the pseudo soul and the true; to choose between the promptings of passion and even the decisions of the mind, and the still inner voice, the real revelation that came in silence and self-communion. This was her Bible, her Koran, her guide, her judge, her friend, her deathless Mentor. To this she was to listen, this to follow, utterly heedless of all else. It was part of his theory that the excessive cultivation of the mind alone which distinguished

this time was, more than even the cultivation of the body, destructive of the soul. It overlaid the soul with a thick impenetrable armour of logic and conceit; turned away its attention from itself; making it deal with the outward instead of the inward, and taught it to seek God in machinery. So that although he told Ella everything, and told her in such a way that the fact and its general scope remained in her memory, yet he did not drill her in geography, or geology, or any of the innumerable sciences. Her science, her study, was to be her own soul. Finding that she had a tendency to interpret herself through the beauties of colour and proportion, he educated her in drawing, and engaged the very first and most expensive assistance in teaching her painting. She had a great natural talent; and as no pains were spared in developing that talent, she made incalculable progress, and became a recognised and a *paid* artist before Lestrange's death. He saw that in this painting, in this exercise of the artistic faculty, she would see her own soul reflected; she would bring it out. And she did so, as

Claudius pointed out; for the detail predominated, that inherent defect of the feminine mind.

There was a time, long years ago, when even Lestrange, then a young man, had felt a little of that passion which we call love; and it had been for a woman beautiful exceedingly, who, for a time at least, showed a disposition to resign the follies of her class and to cultivate her *real* self. But it was for a time only; she saw Colonel Lovel, and left the mind for the body, or rather for the body's clothing. The handsome military officer far outshone the pale student. She was Claudius Lovel's mother. The Colonel was killed in the Crimea; his widow died of consumption, leaving Lestrange trustee to her son. Lestrange took him, brought him up, educated him as he was doing Ella, but in a rather different way. He did not make such a companion of the boy. He threw him out more into the world that he might gather hardness and experience, knowledge of his fellow creatures — for he deemed this needful to a man. Nevertheless he tutored him deeply; trained up the impressionable mind in his own grooves. Clau-

dius, too, showed signs of an artistic nature, but he did not take to painting. He complained that the canvas and the millboard always looked flat to him—instead of standing out, the drawing or the picture appeared flat. He had not that perception of perspective and light and shadow which Ella had. He drew beautifully, but it was only in outline—correct, elegant; but he could not fill-in the shades. His idea of beauty in form was more proportion than colour. So that he admired a superb piece of architecture more than a picture, when harmony reigned; when it was outline solidified, so to say. But his passion was sculpture. This to him was divine. Ella said that the statue, the cold marble, always looked to her dead, the eyeballs vacant, the attitude stiff, the whole thing stone, and nothing more. To Claudius, the harmony of the outline, the proportion, gave it life. He dignified sculpture, worshipped it. Therefore he was taught architecture as a profession; for a man, said Lestrange, even if removed from want, and in prospect of wealth, should still know some means of gaining his bread; and he

was taught sculpture as a pleasure. He, too, was initiated into the doctrine of the soul; but he too frequently confounded it with the mind, with the highest exercise of the intellect, and looked upon that as inspiration which was really the result of thought. These two, Ella and Claudius, were of late much together at Lestrange's. They certainly did not look on one another as brother and sister; certainly not either as strangers; least of all as possible lovers. The sentiment of love never entered their minds. Their life at Lestrange's forbade it, or rather prevented their thoughts dwelling upon such matters. Just as Agassiz

> 'Wander'd away, away,
> With Nature, the dear old nurse,
> Who sang to him night and day
> The rhymes of the universe;
> And still as the way grew long,
> Or his spirits began to fail,
> She would sing a more wonderful song,
> Or tell a more wonderful tale,'—

so these two wandered away, with Lestrange for their guide, into the mysteries of nature, into the realms of human thought, ever seeking, ever finding, till they arrived, by slow degrees, at that almost divine state, the

ohne hast, ohne rast of the star doing its God-appointed work in the sky, as their souls were doing their God-appointed work upon the earth.

Long before his death, Lestrange had marked out for them a course of foreign travel, which they were to accomplish in company, together and yet apart. Ella to study the works of the old masters, Claudius the architecture and sculpture of our teachers in these things, and both to acquire that indescribable taste and tact in art matters which can only thus be obtained. He had taught them too much about the soul for them to mourn his death in the hackneyed way. They left shortly afterwards for the Belgium capital; they had seen Paris with Lestrange himself some time since.

They went to Waterloo out of the ineradicable British patriotism (!); but they were satiated with that one sight-seeing expedition, and resolved upon no more. Next day Claudius departed to study the Hôtel de Ville and cathedrals within easy reach of Brussels, and Ella entered the picture-galleries.

CHAPTER XIV.

Ulysses wearied even of Circe. The great enchantress, the daughter of the sun and friend of the sirens, who could turn men to swine, failed in this one thing, like weaker women. She could not enchant the man who lived always with her. Ay, but this Ulysses was pining for Penelope. Very good, and when he got her, how long did he care for her? Tennyson tells us he waited a year or so, and then sailed away again with his friends far out into the illimitable ocean, commencing a voyage from which he never returned. It was not Penelope, therefore, who acted as the herb 'moly' to counteract the charms of Circe. It was Circe herself. The very flowers sprang up as she walked upon them, ferns bordered her path, fruit hung over her, the warm rays of the sun were softened and subdued and fell in a radiance like a halo round

her form. She walked a goddess, an immortal and divine being, made of no clay, but shaped of Light itself—Light the daughter of the sun—and no man who once saw her could take his gaze from her countenance. The land bloomed perpetually with all the glories of a tropical clime without its overwhelming heat. The ferns grew thirty feet high, shadowing the plain like trees; the mosses were up to the shoulders, great forests of dark green moss—there was a luxuriance, an intensity of growth, a fulness of life. Here Nature put forth her grandest efforts—here in one spot concentrated her beauty and her glory. The bell-shaped flowers hung over the path—deep enormous bells, under which a man could hide from the noontide heat, and look up at an azure dome with pendent lamps of purest white and brightest yellow—the stamens of these wondrous flowers. The breeze shook them, and the pollen snowed upon the earth; the honey dropped from them, and there was an odour as of heaven. And she, who can describe the whiteness of her skin, the magic of her glance, the mellow

tones of her voice, the wave of her exquisite hand? She sings, and lo the very clouds move slowly in the sky, the sun pauses, the trees forget to wave and the wind to blow, the flowers droop, a hazy yellowy mist rises and clothes all things in a slumbrous vapour, blotting out the horizon, smoothing away all angles and outlines, till the earth seems in a dream. And still the voice floats through the air, as a lark warbling from on high, till high heaven grows drowsy with the song. Bronzed with the iron blasts of the stormy wind, beaten hither and thither by raging seas, the victim of misfortunes of every kind, cast out from among men to die in wildernesses—hither Ulysses comes, and sits under the shadow of this mighty lotos-tree. The circling year goes round unnoticed. The Pleiades rise and set, are seen no more, and once again come into view; the starry Orion spans the sky, sinks beneath the wave, and spans it once again. Then he wakes, this man of toils, and longs to leave her whose merest word can make rude earth a Paradise. Not even Circe can enchant the man who is

always with her. The wand is waved in vain, the fatal words are uttered; the wand is but a stick, the magic words but breath, they fall unheeded upon the man armed with the herb 'moly'—that is, with knowledge. The moment that knowledge is attained the Paradise fades away; we are driven forth by flaming swords into an earth of thorns and thistles, there to wander, finding Eden never more.

Georgiana was no Circe. Her long and lovely hair was no magic net, her fine arms no irresistibly divine limbs, her voice no siren tone; yet she was lovely and noble, good and even grand in her own particular way. I do not think she was ever conscious that Neville was weary, that either of them really recognised the fact that they were tired of each other. They laid the blame upon their surroundings. It was better that they should do so. The air of the Continent was not so good as the English; there was a dryness about it, a too great dryness, as if it had been burnt. The fields were brown; they had never that lovely green of the country

at home. The trees were unnatural, they did not grow so large and full; they looked stunted, sleepy. The hotels were miserable; half-carpeted, cold, draughty, unhealthy. In one they were placed on the ground floor; in the next, close to the sky, with the tiles overhead, and the stars visible through the skylight. Nothing was clean; everything oily, even the floors. People were so rude, and even indecent. The famous cookery was a myth; the politeness equally so. The railway travelling was abominable; their trains crept along slow as a caterpillar with a hundred legs, ninety-eight of which are an encumbrance. Even the dresses were a sham, for the women who wore them were horridly dirty. The pictures were no better than those in England by our own native artists, it was only the name of the thing.

The Spas were the most wretched holes on the face of creation—lazar spots where all the bodily infirm and the morally crippled resorted; where the population was composed of miserable invalids, feverish gamblers, cheating landlords, and silly people who thought they

were fashionable. This did not come all at once; the change from pleasure to discontent was slow and imperceptible. The first two months went smoothly, without a check. Each readily gave up little habits to the other. Georgie was by nature an early riser; she invariably rose at seven in her own house, breakfasted, and walked an hour, wet or shine, before study. Neville had for years contracted a habit of remaining in bed till nearly noon, and scarcely ever went out till evening. The moonlight was better than the sunlight, he said, if you were in the country; if in the town, the gaslight threw a glamour over the defects and deficiencies which the glaring sun brought into too great prominence. His true reason was his love of dreaming—of solitary day-dreams. He did not sleep after nine, though his eyes were closed. A vast multitude of images were passing through his mind. By long practice he had arrived at that state when his mental vision could see those 'images of Epicurus, composed of infinitely small atoms, which are constantly gliding about us like phantoms.' It was then

that he really lived. This sleep was really a waking existence. It was bad, very bad no doubt, for his mind; it destroyed all sense of reality, so much so that he could hardly understand the sense of what he had written once the pen was laid aside. While he was writing he knew because of the idea in his own mind; let that idea once filter into words, and, although he could recall the idea, he could not gather any sense or meaning from the black scrawl. His existence had in fact become itself an abstract idea, and he could not bear to be awakened from it. If he locked his desk, or any other place which he wished to be particularly secure, he never felt certain that he really had locked it. He would unlock it again to convince himself, then relock it, lift it up to see if the two parts held together, and even then return to it to see that he had left no paper or document out on the table. He seemed to have lost all feeling of matter—matter did not exist; it was all abstract ideas. From these he could not bear to be awakened and brought back to the material world. It jarred upon him; he frowned and

sulked till silence and solitude brought back his invisible world to him again.

From nine till noon every morning was his favourite time for this dreaming. He felt then that he was by himself, totally alone. His room was not in darkness by any means; he had the curtains open, so that he could see out into the fields or garden. All that he wanted was a field or a garden across which no person walked while he looked out on it. That garden he peopled with beings—whether men and women, or other creatures of his own imagination — each intent on his own ends and purposes, and forming endless combinations. All the while he was perfectly conscious that these images were shadows only, creatures of his own brain; but he revelled in them just as much, and was as interested in their fate, though he wove their course of destiny himself. He could enjoy nothing with others, let it be sea, or sun, or forest, beauty of any kind. If he stood before a picture, and slowly reconstructed it in his own mind, till he saw, not the rude daub (for the very best of pictures *are* rude daubs), not

the paint or even the colour, but the artist's idea; till he saw the picture the artist had tried to paint—a voice, a word, the presence of another person instantly destroyed the vision, and the canvas became flat and dead, 'painty,' white and black, red and blue. If he stood before a bust of the great Julius till the lines in that wondrous face deepened into a divine anxiety, and the mouth was drawn back with a more than mortal suspense; till the blank eyeballs filled with a liquid orb, piercing into the very heart, seeing through all disguise; till the star on his forehead, the cold marble star, lit itself up and glittered and shone; till this Human Fate came into life—then the sound of a footstep, the lightest laugh, and the whole was gone, and nothing remained but the dusty inanimate blank marble. He reposed upon the grass under the shadow of a tree, till the warmth of the sun filled his veins with a drowsy, slumberous, yet intense *vitality*, while the leaves danced in slow and intricate measure between him and the sky, and the clouds sailed onwards to their havens far away below the horizon.

The grass grew alive around him with countless numbers of tiny living things, barely visible to the eye, yet each with its organs, its senses and sensations, its hopes and fears and griefs, its life, and its hour of bitter death to come. He lost all sense of his own *separate* existence; his soul became merged in the life of the tree, of the grass, of the thousands of insects, finally in the life of the broad earth underneath, till he felt himself as it were a leaf upon the great cedar of existence. Then he lost all sense of joy or pain, of hope or fear, of ambition, of hatred and jealousy, even of love. He was merged in the great soul that binds all things together. It was the Nirvana—the extinction of existence, and yet the entrance into true existence. Time, thought, feeling, sense, were gone, all lost; nothing remained but the mere grand fact, the exquisite delight, the infinite joy of existence only. Then a word, a noise, the sound of his name awoke him. The sunlight lost its glamour, the dancing leaves moved no more in regular rhythm, but helplessly and purposelessly, the clouds became vapour only,

the azure only the result of extreme distance and tenuity; matter jarred on him again. He was unreasonably peevish at these interruptions. So it was that in those journeys he had taken about the world he had invariably started with Noel, and as invariably parted from him the moment they arrived at the verge of the unknown, where he lay down and dreamt, and the other sprang forward and stripped the desert of its mirage, the forest of its illusion, and the ocean of its infinity. So he had shunned society, dwelling much by himself, reading much, conversing little. Why then had he taken Georgiana to be with him always and ever? Though he was so fond of the abstract, yet Neville's body, his organs, and his senses were not dead. The life in him loved her as other men love; the abstract idealism of the man clouded her round about with an atmosphere of hazy splendour. His mind really admired her. He was solitary; he could find none who understood him, who appreciated him, even who could tolerate him; certainly none whom *he* could tolerate. He clung to her as

nearest his own being, as of his own order. He invested her with all his dreams; he built about her a palace of his own ideas. Why should he anticipate her habits more than the millions of men who have married before him?

She was in deed and in truth much that he imagined her to be. She was not a lay figure dressed to suit his taste. She was indeed such a statue as his soul could put life into. The beauty and glory with which he had invested her were really and genuinely her due in great measure. He did not marry her to discover afterwards that she was a mistake.

But their habits! Now Georgie was fond of society; not of noise and excitement, but she was sociable in the best sense. She liked to exchange her ideas, to receive new ones, to discuss others. She could not enjoy the finest picture, the noblest sculpture, without some one to speak to, some one to join in her admiration, or at least to dispute it. The abstract did not exist to her as it did to Neville. Her mind was active, but it was

busy with material things, with living beings; not with the dead, and with the abstract *x* of the imagination. She had a deep fellow-feeling with her friends and with human nature at large—a fellow-feeling in which Neville was almost entirely wanting. He had much more communion with an inanimate tree, with a tiny insect, with the senseless and soulless sun, than with any man or woman. He was not cruel, nor in any way inhumane, but he did not seem to realise that other creatures had feelings. His indifference to suffering had shocked her many times. Georgie was peculiarly *human*, if that word may be used in such a sense. She felt far more than the generality of her sex, who surround themselves too often with dress and affectation till misery and death itself lose their real significance and become mere words alone. To her misery was real, poverty a mighty evil, death a reality, pain a visible and tangible thing. How tenderly she had devoted herself to rouse poor unhappy Heloise; how many, many times had the poor had occasion to bless her ministrations!

Neville rather shrank from the poor ; not that he disdained them, or that he had any affected notions of '*porcelainity*,' but because they disturbed him ; their rags, their groans, their very *smell* banished the halo which he wished to have always round him. He gladly gave them money, but the direst necessity could not draw him personally to their side. His was the most idealised, etherealised, abstract selfishness that could be imagined ; but selfishness it was nevertheless, and of a character that nothing could ever modify, fixed for the whole term of life.

Georgiana never enjoyed anything alone ; even the assistance she gave to the poor and wretched gave her no pleasure unless she had a companion ; not that she wished her good deeds blazoned afar, but because it was her nature to be ever sociable. She had been weak and womanish enough, with all her mind and penetration, to fondly delude herself into the belief that when she married Neville she should always have an appreciative companion. She believed that she could bring him to find a pleasure in accompanying

her in her missions of relief and kindness. She had the fullest faith that he would be to her an hourly companion. She looked forward to hanging on his arm in those noble cathedrals of the Continent, and listening to the conceptions of his mind—a mind which she revered and almost worshipped—as a disciple might listen to a master, till her soul glowed with *his* inspiration. She looked forward to standing by his side on the glacier and at the edge of the fearful precipice, feeling with him the dread and yet at the same moment the pleasure of the immense and measureless height. With him she should read and study, the same subject and the same book, his hand in hers, their eyes upon the same page. The very soul of this loving and noble woman clung to him. In a month, in two months, in the beginning of the third month, how different from what she had so eagerly longed for! How gladly would she have accommodated her habits to his—foregone her early meal, her early healthy walk, her joy in the sunshine and the fresh air of the morning! Willingly she would have

granted to him hours of lonely study, just as she wished for herself a few minutes at least daily of solitary prayer. But this was not enough. The man grew utterly irritable, discontented, restless. The woman grew thoughtful, unhappy; still tender and loving, but doubting her own power to content him. It was nothing but his long and ineradicable habit of dwelling with himself. He did not love her the less, he would not have parted with her for the world; but he sighed for his old existence, his ancient silence and solitude, his halo of imagination, his communion with the soul of the world. He could not reconstruct the ideal of the painter standing before a picture with Georgie on his arm; he could not enter into the conception of the artist in stone with her beside him in the gloom of the cathedral; the statue remained dead and cold while he felt her touch. The inspiration died in his mind; he felt *matter* always. Then he grew irritable. The more he grew irritable, she—wishing to please him, and divining the cause — left him to himself. With long hours of solitude came back part of the old

dreams and imaginings. The old life reasserted itself, and he clung to it more and more. In the beginning of the third month they had ceased to occupy the same rooms. Georgie rose for her seven-o'clock stroll, but depressed and unhappy. Neville slept till noon; but even through his abstract ideas there ran a thin streak of pain. He was irritated with her for disturbing him, and yet at the same time angry with himself for not appreciating her more than he did. But wisely and lovingly they said nothing of this to each other. They blamed the Continent and its ways. It was in this mood they returned to England very early in June.

CHAPTER XV.

'I'll lay a level hundred they marry outright in ten months,' said Corney Villiers.

'I'll take it,' said the Duke.

'Good—is it a bet?'

A nod from the Duke indicated that it was; and down went the record in Villiers' red memorandum-book.

These two were languidly reposing on one of those double-backed seats at the Royal Academy, in front of one of the pictures of the season.

'For,' said Villiers, 'if you want to see who's in town, sit here, and they'll all pass in review in the course of an hour or so.'

So they saw Georgiana Brandon and her husband standing before the said picture, and the bet was the result.

This picture was only a horse's head—a mere head and neck—just such a design as one sees every day in crayons hung up in

Miss This or Master That's bedroom, framed as a trophy of school talent; a mere tame design, lacking all spirit and soul. But it was the extraordinary finish of detail that gave it its success. The head itself, the ears, the mane, the eye, were all complete, so minutely perfect that the picture seemed to literally live and to stand out from the canvas. Especially the eye; it was looking as full at you as animals ever do look. Save and except for a moment, horse, dog, or cat will not gaze into your eyes. They shrink from it; their eyes turn away, so that you can see the eyeball, but not direct into the mind of the creature, as it were. Why is this? Is it the innate sense of inferiority, of shame, or of a fear, even when most familiar? But so it is; and the artist had faithfully reproduced the peculiar sidelong glance—half at you, half away—of a horse at which persons are intently gazing, so that, as you looked at this picture, the eyeballs, that at first appeared to stare straight into your face, gradually turned away, as the living creature's would have done, and you saw the sheen of reflected light

upon them. A dark deep eye, full of meaning and life—that strangely liquid eye that horses have—brown in itself, and yet with a blue tint in the extreme depth, like a pool in shadow. There was a fly—one of the pests of equine life—gradually crawling with those short quick runs and pauses (you could seem to see it move) towards the eye; it was already on the edge of the lid; in another moment it seemed as if the lids would twitch in the attempt to throw off the tormentor. In the corner of the eye there was a liquid drop, a tear. Sylvia Vane declared it made her want to wipe it away with her handkerchief. But perhaps the most wonderful part was the hairs; they were so minutely painted that each hair was perfect in itself. The neck was no blotch of brown colour; it was composed of innumerable hairs, each perfectly painted—a marvellous effort of skill and that eternal patience which an apostle of art called genius. There was no action in this head, its *pose* was languid, its outline languid; its execution made it live, and people—especially the ladies, whose instincts the completion of

detail appealed to—crowded about it as the sensation of the season. The picture was signed in one corner 'Ella.'

It was at this Georgie and Neville stayed to gaze. There Neville left her; and Georgie, a trifle tired with pacing the long galleries, sat down side by side with the Duke and Villiers, who knew her story, but not herself personally.

Neville wandered away in a dawdling listless manner, looking more at the crowd than at the walls, for he knew that it was in vain for him to attempt to enter into the spirit of the artists in his own peculiar way in the midst of that rustling assembly.

Georgie had sat there half an hour, now dwelling on the horse's head, now examining her catalogue, now the dresses of those who swept about her—for Georgie, with all her strength of mind, was not proof against a bonnet;

> 'No woman's eye, however large her head,
> Can pass a bonnet or a feather-bed.' *Pseudo Pope.*

Lady Clanbarris pounced on her while she was absorbed in a fascinating polonaise. A

tall Scotch peeress, angular in the cheek-bone, angular in her own will, but dressed to—perfection. There was much hand-shaking and inquiry, and why ever had not Georgie called on her?

Georgie hesitated; said they had only returned four days, and—and (she blushed ever so slightly) the circumstances were singular.

'O, nonsense!' cried her ladyship, loud enough to be heard across the room. 'We all honour your courage, are all proud of you. Where is *he?*' By which she meant Neville.

'O, look, mamma,' cried Sylvia Vane, who was a rather gushing girl of seventeen; 'there's that extraordinary Georgie Knoyle, I do declare! O, do come! We *used* to know her, Cecilia. O, do, mamma, let us *see* her; let *me*; I *must!*'

'Hush!' whispered the Hon. Mrs. Vane; 'she'll hear. I do not approve of such people.'

'But I take an interest in them,' said Cecilia, in a calm cool tone (as much as to say, 'My will is law'), as she took a step towards the obnoxious person. Cecilia was a belle, if not *the* belle of the hour; a tall fine girl of nineteen,

cool as high-pressure education, both school and social, could make her, with a fortune of 80,000*l.*, and heiress to a title. She had been thoroughly well 'put up.' If a boy is left heir to a dukedom and 30,000*l.* a year, as a matter of course his trustees teach him the extreme value of money by making a lawyer of him. This girl—for girl she was in years—thoroughly understood her position. She knew her chaperone, the Hon. Mrs. Vane, with this portionless, or nearly so, daughter to marry, could not dispense with her services. All the men, you see, who fluttered round the heiress could not marry her; ten chances to one but somebody out of the lot would be smitten with a Vane. So the cool Cecilia calmly stepped up to the unconscious Georgie, and the Hon. Mrs. Vane had to make the best of it, at the same time frowning sideways at Sylvia.

'You need not frown at me, mamma,' said that pert young lady, thereby heating the maternal wrath to boiling-point.

A moment afterwards Mrs. Vane's softest tones were introducing the heiress to that 'creature.' The heiress had hardly spoken to

Georgie when the Duke and Villiers, who were sitting at the other side of the seat, came round, shook hands with Cecilia, and were introduced likewise. Then there ensued a smart colloquy.

'I think,' said Cecilia, in her cool deliberate tones, 'that you deserve a medal of the very best gold, and that you ought to be made a viscountess. I wish I had such a mind and *such* courage.'

'Mrs. Brandon—no, I mean Knoyle—I mean Brandon—I—I—' the Duke actually blushed and stammered. He did not know what to call her.

'Mrs. Brandon,' said Georgie, 'if you please.'

'Mrs. Brandon,' said the Duke, annoyed with his own want of tact, 'I have wished to make your acquaintance for months. I was never so interested in a thing in my life. Howard—that's my brother, he is in the House—spoke of it for two hours; made a capital speech, 'pon my honour; ought to be the duke, did Howard—man of talent—astonishing clever—you must know him. By the bye, we give a garden party at our place by the Thames

next week; the Duchess would be delighted; told me specially to look out for you.'

Georgie had by this time recovered her self-possession. For a moment she shrank from the position which her singular marriage had placed her in, and hesitated. Then she cast a glance at the Hon. Mrs. Vane, and saw that woman's face working with mortified rage, and in an instant she determined to accept.

Villiers and the Duke took them through the whole range of the rooms. People saw this, and Georgiana in one short hour became the fashion.

'She's a fine woman, by Jove,' said the Duke to Villiers as they parted at last, and the two drove off to Lord's Ground. 'A contrast to our puny girls. Look at her waist! Now I hate a waist you could put a bracelet round; it's unnatural; it's absurd.'

For an hour or so Neville was proud of her at the garden party by the Thames. Society gathered round her like wasps round a ripe plum. Rank, title, wealth vied to exchange a word with her—she was not left a moment to herself. They would have killed her with ices,

drowned her in wine and cooling drinks; and she bore it all so queenly, so calmly, with such superb and natural grace, as if she had been born to it, and it was her due. Truth to say there was a little feminine triumph in her heart, as how indeed could it be otherwise? She remembered the spiteful things that had been written and said of her by these very persons—those fellow-labourers in the cause—from whom she had expected the heartiest co-operation. They had had this effect—they had made her feel isolated, lowered in her own esteem, let it be ever so slightly. Now the tide had turned, now she was above them, they would cower at her feet and cringe to her; and why? Because fashion was with her. How she detested and despised the whole band of weak and fickle creatures, who had the impudence to call themselves the equals of men; who even hinted at their apostleship! Her beauty had not a little to do with her success. It was not a drawing-room beauty; it was a beauty naturally associated with boldness, resolution, with Athene, the blue-eyed maid of Homer. There was something Homeric in her *pose*—something

grand and even heroic in the style of her very walk, in her very simplicity and straightforwardness. The men especially crowded about her. They admired her upright walk; her total abstention from the *minauderie* of the day; the freedom of her movements; her ease and grace. It so chanced that just then Gladstone and the *Contemporary* had managed to draw a passing attention to Homer in the fashionable throng; so the fellows dubbed her La Athene—she was so called even in the *Morning Post* and *John Bull*—that strange mixture of religion and dress, and, despite the odd mixture, one of the best papers of the day. With the women her success was more partial but more decided: they split into two factions. The younger girls took her part—those that were marriageable, lively, and full of hopes. So did the married ones—those whose hopes were crowned with fruition, who were settled. But the widows and the elder daughters hated her with a venom peculiarly their own, and assisted the clerical party to throw the *odium theologicum* on her. This very fact brought up a fresh reinforcement to her assistance. All

the socialists and reformers, all the atheists, secret or pronounced, especially the secret ones, whose number in our day is legion, rushed to her side, and made a battle-cry of her. Headed by Howard, the Duke's brother, who, as the younger son of a peer, and consequently shut out from the title, was a rabid republican, they went dash into Parliament, and put a bill upon the orders of motion for next session legalising such a method of marriage. Just then came on the annual discussion over the deceased wife's sister, and Howard and his friends contrived easily to introduce the whole question of marriage. The solid ranks of respectability, the villa people especially, were alarmed to their very centre. The pulpits rang with denunciation; the press teemed with animadversions on either side. The more the villa people cried out against her, the more the titled people upheld her, for there is an instinctive aversion between the two classes. These nameless respectabilities who dwell in villas, dotted by thousands round London, in Kent, Surrey, and such home counties, have taken a prominent part lately in the affairs of the nation. They

have grown conscious of their power and of their numbers. They possess a command of money in many cases far superior to that of the pure aristocracy, and their money is immediately available. It is not locked up in land, requiring months, and even years, to realise it if wanted. A man may be worth half a million in land and yet want a thousand. Cash is not so readily lent on that security as some people imagine. There is always a suspicion of mortgage about it; and if it is entailed, and the owner cannot sell, what security has the lender that his capital will ever return? Even when an estate is sold the process is tedious in the extreme. But these villa folk have their capital at their fingers' ends; in shares, stocks, consols, debentures, or at worst, in manufactures, ships, merchandise. They can get the command of immense sums at a day's notice, because their affairs are well known, and their means of repayment estimated to a sovereign. Into any movement, therefore, they can throw a monetary weight and influence unsurpassed by that of any class in the kingdom. In addition, they have the power that the employment

of thousands of artisans gives in these times. A landed proprietor may have five or six thousand persons living on his estate, of whom his tenants-in-chief, his farmers, tradesmen, and so on, may number from two to even three hundred; but such estates as these are few, and besides they have this weakness, they cannot carry the rank and file with them, even if the rank and file be willing. The rank and file either have no votes, or if they have, and even if they actually do 'go right,' yet they throw no *verve*, none of that 'cry' into it, which is above all things necessary in a time when 'cry' is everything. But the artisans of London have votes by the thousand, and they register them all. They are more or less educated men—they read the papers, they discuss politics, they enter into the religious questions of the day. Nine out of ten follow the lead of their employers—not from direct compulsion, but from indirect influence. For these employers, though strict and even 'finical' to a fault, spare no pains and no expense for the comfort and well-being of their men. If a man is sick there is wine, medicine, rest—even in

some cases the seaside; if he dies his widow is looked after. His wages are punctually paid; he receives an annual rise. Then there is the religious organisation, chiefly evangelical, which issues books, pamphlets, tracts by the million, and some of these at least take root, and act like a bearing-rein upon the masses. So it is that these merchants and manufacturers, these printers and sugar people and silk people and draper people, and so forth, who spend their days in town, and go out in the evening to their villa ten, twenty, thirty miles from the metropolis, possess a power and an influence almost irresistible. And between them and the aristocrats of birth and landed possessions there exists the bitterest antagonism; far bitterer than ever existed between the aristocrat and the proletarian. Indeed the patrician of our time has almost come to hob-nob with the proletarian, and it is the villa class who exhibit hostility to mob-rule. These villa people, chiefly evangelical or nonconformist, raged with boiling hatred against the innovation made by Georgie and Neville; therefore the patricians sided with them more and more, till

their days became a round of fashionable amusement, till they had more invitations than they could possibly have disposed of in half a dozen years. And Georgie? The woman was strong enough in her to make her throw herself into the vortex with a delight all the more intense that she had hitherto lived quietly out of the charmed circle. And Neville? He watched her at first with satisfaction; then he grew restless; then he too yielded to the fascination of excitement.

With a species of abstract astonishment he found himself on the stand at Ascot with the Duke and Villiers, betting—not heavily, but enough to make the game exciting—on the dark favourite, of whom Villiers' agents had given the best account. He, the abstract idealist, the transcendentalist, was intent upon the charge of the 'light brigade' to success or failure.

Georgiana was with the Duchess and her daughter at Madame Louise's. Such exquisite bonnets! This was how the firm of Knoyle and Brandon were engaged in June 187—.

CHAPTER XVI.

Claudius did not admire the famous stained-glass window in St. Gudule. There was an exquisite finish, a delicate colouring, a noble proportion about it; but it lacked the one essential feature. Gaze at it as long as you might, you never saw the mind of the artist rise up before you. It was a picture—nothing more—not a thought. He had a memory of another window far away, on the edge of an English county, buried in the obscurity of a wretched little town, or rather village, out of the track of tourists or seekers after art. This window fell flat on the eye at first. Taught to expect a sudden surprise by the gossip of the country-side, as the traveller approaches it the eye wanders over it disappointed, dulled, and deadened. But by and by, with silence and with steady gazing on this window, the grotesque legends grow into a grim life, and the figures move and shriek and

writhe in agony in that horrible hell. A vast mass of colour in purple, blue, and yellow—the great daubs of blue resolve themselves into demons thus represented of the most intense flame. For the hottest fire is blue—look at a candle, look at the jet of gas, there is a blue spot, an azure circle; therefore has the artist made his demons purplish and blue, whose very approach shrivels up the damned. And where is HE—the dweller in the pit? See, he is at the bottom, as if supporting the whole diabolical scene upon his shoulders, the Atlas of Hades. Here is an awful toad; here and there grow flowers—yes, absolutely yellow and blue flowers—the lilies of the valley of the shadow of death. Gaze at it, and gradually the rudeness, the utter want of cohesion in the picture, the contempt of all perspective, fade away out of sight, and it becomes a breathing reality, breathing fire and torture and misery indescribable. The mind of the artist, his ideas, stand out before you, fasten on and fascinate you, and form a picture on your mind which time cannot efface. To Claudius this was genius; and the window at St. Gudule, with all its

delicate proportion, its exquisite colour, was tame and flat—a mere drawing-room sketch in copybook handwriting, like the flourishes on the first page of the ciphering-book—clever penmanship, but meaning nothing. The unknown artist who wrote his signature in these marvellous pictures upon the windows in the obscure Gloucestershire village had a meaning, and has left it plain to all who choose to see it. He was the Doré of those days; and in our time what would be Dante to us without Doré to give form and shape to the ideas of the poet?

Ella listened to the music of his lips that lovely day in June as they stood in the gloom of the vast old cathedral. Her mind was wrapped up in his words, her cheek glowed a little, her mouth slightly open, her eyes glistened; to this girl art was life itself, and Claudius was art in human shape.

What were those gods and goddesses who walked upon the earth in the olden time, who came down all glory and majesty, yet subdued, that man might not be afraid, who filled the very air with their sweetness and their beauty? Were they not art in its true shape, visible

divinity, the essence of all loveliness? Was there no danger of Ella loving him, and loving him too deeply for her own peace of mind? The woman of the world must sneer at this pair, and believe them utter myths, impossibilities. With such opportunities mischief *must* have ensued. But mischief did not ensue. For remember Ella had not been bred up as the daughters of men are usually bred, tutored from morning to night in the knowledge of evil. Here is a scoffer and a liar, a traducer of mothers and aunts, a slanderer of academies and seminaries! Shriek at him—down with him! True it is that the very word of evil, the very existence of it, is politely ignored—there is no such thing. A careful mamma once attacked a certain novelist, abusing him for mentioning a certain class of women in his books; her child should not read them, she had never heard of such creatures, and had no idea that such could live. 'Then, madam,' replied the novelist, 'she has never read her Bible.' And the mamma, overcome, retreated under cover of 'sacrilege and profanation,' and such similar cries. 'She

thinketh no evil;' such should be the words which our parents ought to be able to truthfully say of their children. Why then teach them so incessantly to be on their guard against the scandal of society, the wickedness of the men, the deceit of the world, the value of money, till the girl thinks of nothing else but evil; not with the idea of following it, but for the purpose of avoiding it? How can her mind be pure if she is taught day and night the wiles of deceit, in order that she may avoid them? Till in the end it comes to this: we all, one and all, little and great, agree in this one thing only—to mistrust each other, to disbelieve in the existence of purity unless accompanied by its outward signs, *i.e.* the ring upon the finger. We have totally forgotten the *Honi soit qui mal y pense* of our royal arms.

Did she love him? I cannot answer that question. Certainly no word of love had ever passed between them. He had never pressed her hand; their lips had never met. Day by day for hours and hours together, yet never had there been a mutual flash of the eyes; never the slightest familiarity. Art threw her

holy mantle over them—her children, and they walked as in the first garden of man, unconscious of their nakedness. For, morally speaking, they were naked in the eyes of the world, wandering about shamelessly together, travelling in company, and no ring, no blood tie even, no chaperone, not even a servant.

Those who have done the world most harm are those who preach perpetually day and night of the infinite wickedness, of the inalienable streak of evil in our nature. Granted that in theological argument such may be the case; even then how much better to keep it out of sight! Let us veneer it over and hide it, till mayhap, in the time to come, it may be partially eradicated. We may be as fierce now as savages in our hearts, as bloodthirsty, as revengeful; but how rarely we seek gratification in bodily violence! That natural instinct has been veneered over—glossed over by long processes of civilisation; and we walk about in safety unalarmed, even if our known enemy dwells next door. Why should it be preached day and night that man and woman cannot live in each other's daily company

without sin? It may be now, and it may be that to the end of time, the animal passions may endure; but is that any reason, any more than in the case of the enmity, that bodily evil shall follow? If the mind and the long processes of civilisation can efface the resort to material violence, why can they not also efface this other mischief? Why should we be for ever divided into two great armies, each resting in its separate camp, protected by truce, but ever distrustful—afraid to wander away a mile from the watchfires, or out of call of the sentinels, lest hovering horsemen should sweep away the stragglers? Where is the mind, the march of intellect, the genuine progress of our day, if two creatures made in God's own image, educated with all the knowledge of the ages past, and inspired with all the hopes of the ages to come, cannot pass to and fro on the earth together without falling into sin? Why should even the thought of evil occur to them?

The thought of evil did not occur to Ella, neither did it to Claudius. Their days they spent together; often their evenings also. They

breakfasted and dined apart, and lived in different hotels. They visited the famous spots of the world, and stood before the human revelations of the times gone by in reverent awe and wonder. For these, Venus de' Medicis, Apollo Belvidere, Laocoon, and Antinous, are they not revelations of the human mind—prophecies of what is to come to pass? The patriarchs and the prophets told us truths of the soul, truths which grow year by year and spread over the earth, and lead slowly onward to the emancipation of humanity from the iron bands of ignorance, superstition, and cruelty. Those great sculptors were the prophets of the body, the apostles of matter; and their prophecies are perhaps even farther off from fulfilment than those of the prophets of the soul. When shall we see men shaped as Antinous, women as the Venus? We have seen both men and women not perfect, but lovely exceedingly in the beauty of their lives. The day may yet come when we shall see them perfect in their bodily frames. For there shall be a new earth and an incorruptible body. Is not perfection

incorruptible? do not these statues shadow forth human perfection? And Art, underwhose shadowing mantle these two children walked, is daily teaching and preaching, telling the multitude to eschew the ugly and the disproportioned, just as the moral preachers tell it to eschew the morally ugly or evil. While we pursue the beautiful, so long as our souls are wrapped up in the contemplation of loveliness, so long is it impossible for us to commit sin. Therefore the artist builds about him a temple, and carries it with him as he walks.

She *did* love him. But marriage—the thought of being joined together for ever by the ceremonies of the Church—never entered into her heart. Sooth to say she had no idea of a time in which she should be apart from him. Therefore she went calmly on, never looking back, never attempting to anticipate the future, happy in the hour. He had not only taken the dead peer's place—he was not only to her patron, father, brother, family and all, but he had taken a place the peer had never occupied. She had no more idea of ever parting from him than from the sun, the

air, and the sky. Nothing could part them but death. Of death I am afraid she never thought. To these artists, these pagans, who live on beauty, who worship it and deify it, and pursue it day by day, I fear the thought of death, of the judgment beyond the grave, never comes, unless indeed to some poor unfortunate drink-sodden, outcast Bohemian. Never to the prosperous, who dwell in the sunshine perpetually. They cannot conceive the non-existence of matter — that is the psychological reason. They have no idea of the non-existence of beauty.

'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever;'

they shall never part from it. Their life is the life of the soul, and the soul feels itself immortal; the thought of dissolution, of an outer darkness, cannot enter into it. Change there may be; but change is a pleasure, a variety from one landscape to another, from one garden to a distinct successor.

She did not know that she loved him. Her heart did not beat quicker at his approach; her pulse was regular, her cheeks pale, her eyes met his fully, and without hesitation.

Her fingers did not linger in his, asking for a pressure. Her love was in this—she had no idea of parting from him; and in this—the intense enjoyment she felt in her art, working with him.

Claudius never questioned himself. In truth he loved her, but the consciousness of it never occurred to him. How should it to either of them? They had been so constantly in each other's society at Lestrange's that the thought of anything unusual, of any peculiarity in the connection between them, never occurred to them. Yet they did not look on each other as brother and sister.

The world is sneering again. Could such a model young man as this exist, to ramble about with a handsome, or at least good-looking, girl, to be in love with her, and yet to refrain from the slightest familiarity? But he had not got to refrain; the impulse did not seize him. Claudius was a gentleman. He was no wild Bohemian in a velvet dress and smoking-cap, a mere man of meerschaum, smelling always of smoke and paint; he was not the traditional artist wanderer, the dis-

grace to art and to humanity. His dress was the outward token of his character, quiet, subdued even to a fault, even here on the Continent, where so much license in these matters is allowed.

They wandered on from Brussels to Cologne, thence to Dresden, afterwards to Prague, and meant to visit Vienna, still living in the same manner—together and yet apart. But at Prague they saw English newspapers, in which Ella's horse's head was loudly applauded, and the crowds around it mentioned. Claudius at once decided that they had better return if the picture was so famous and so popular; buyers would be sure to turn up, and Ella ought to be on the spot to secure the largest price. They returned to London, and here again followed the same plan—Ella was accommodated at a private hotel near Euston; Cladius took apartments in Russell-square. The apartments were cheaper than hotel life; he could thus contribute more to her expenses, and be satisfied that so far as *menu* was concerned she did not suffer much. They went day after day to the Academy; they

wandered about the room, and had the intense satisfaction of seeing scores of people stopping before Ella's marvellous piece of detail. Timidly she called Claudius's attention to the fact that his theory was not shared in by all persons; here was a work in which detail was all, and yet see—and she nodded with a glow of natural pride in the direction of the head. Claudius granted that if success was a proof she was right, but he still remained firmly fixed in his own belief that the idea was all in all in a painting. Discussing thus they had drawn nearer to the spot where it was hung, and thus overheard the criticisms of a party of friends. It was Georgiana, the Duchess her inseparable companion, Cecilia, and Mrs. Vane, who had brought with them Noel Brandon, who was in London, to see this famous picture which Royalty itself had paused to gaze on. No sooner had Noel glanced at it than he exclaimed, 'My horse, my horse!' in tones that drew all eyes upon him. They questioned him, and he said that it irresistibly reminded him of his favourite animal which had dashed with him over the cliff.

'Who is the artist? I will give anything for this,' cried Noel in excitement.

'I painted it,' said Ella very faintly.

Together they had drawn up close to the group. These details need not detain us. After a few days Noel bought the head for a thousand guineas, and Ella became the friend of Georgiana Brandon. Inquiring into her friends and relations, Georgiana found out the truth which Ella stated without the slightest reserve. Georgiana become full of interest. She tried to introduce Ella into the whirling circle of fashion in which her days were passed, but society would not have it.

The Hon. Mrs. Vane hit the mark for once at least. 'You, my dear,' said she, addressing Georgiana in her most dulcet tones, 'you have at least gone through some form of marriage; but these two are wandering—well, I will not say vagabonds—without a tie upon each other.'

Neither would Ella have it. She shrank even from the glitter and bustle of those few private friends to whom Georgie brought her. She wished to be alone with Claudius. The

very glimpse she caught of this life—this incessant whirl and crush—sent her back shivering, afraid lest ever it should be her lot to dwell thus in restlessness. Then came the dread, for the first time in her life, that Claudius might be drawn into the vortex and separated from her. It was the first time that the idea had occurred to her—it frightened her; she used her gentle influence to draw him away. He was nothing loth. Something of the same kind had passed through his mind. No course could be so happy as theirs—no life so entirely joyful, so peacefully delicious. Promising to keep up a correspondence with Georgie, Ella left by herself, and rejoined Claudius in Paris, whither he had preceded her a few days. Finding they were there, Georgiana wrote to Horton, and he called upon them.

To Georgiana the spectacle of these two was doubly interesting: first, because in some degree it recalled her own experiment; but chiefly because of the gnawing worm in her heart—the consciousness that Neville had tired of her society since their marriage—

only since they had become one. But these two never tired of each other. All the romance of love clung to them, shorn of its stormy passions, shorn of the dulness, the heaviness, the indifference which is, or seems to be, the inevitable result of marriage, if indeed nothing worse occurs. Being naturally of a logical turn, and in long habit of reducing her ideas to writing, Georgie found time, even in the incessant business of visiting and pleasure, to draw up a scheme for the regulation of such wanderers as these. They should be, she wrote, persons of highly educated mind, polished and high-bred, trained in the traditions of politeness. They should have some object in view—some real study or work. Each should possess some means, and these means should be either nearly equal, or the one that possessed the larger share should consent to forego that advantage, and be content to live in a style suited to the slenderer income of the other; so that in fact there might be perfect equality and perfect independence. To some extent, the route to be followed should be laid down before starting.

Perhaps it would be better if the parties were not too great friends, or too closely connected —rather advantageous that they should be introduced to each other by the medium of advertisement, as travelling companions are now. All these details the experience of society could work out. To her mind there was nothing absurd or in any way difficult for a rational man and a rational woman to walk together through the world, pursuing a mutual object, lending each other mutual assistance, cheering each other by company, and perhaps even preserving each other from ignoble pursuits by that very companionship. The grand beauty of it was that this plan possessed that romance, that delicate appreciation of each other, which marriage—even the partial engagement of her own—evidently destroyed. She wrote very earnestly to Horton about them.

And Noel was in London.

CHAPTER XVII.

Heloise had no peace; Noel had destroyed it. She could have lingered about the fields and woods, wandering with him in a dream of pleasure for ever and ever, had he not asked her to fly with him. Disguised as it might be under the softest and most specious guise, the proposal, though barely more than hinted at, went full to her heart in all its naked evil. It awoke her from her dream—it dispelled the pleasure—the fields and woods smiled no more; for it brought to her mind the consciousness of guilt. She had never, as it were, seen herself before. This proposal put a mirror before her, and she saw the crime of which she had been guilty, and the still more tremendous crime upon whose edge she had trembled. In the silence and solitude of her own chamber hot burning blushes suffused her cheeks. She felt the embraces Noel had

showered upon her in that lonely nook—they clung to her, and she could not shake them off, miserable as she was with shame. Yet underneath those very blushes, that very shame, her heart beat faster and faster. An idea had been planted in her which grew and flourished and bid fair to occupy her whole soul—an idea which, guilty and wretched as it was, promised her the most exquisite happiness. Till by degrees the wild desire to fly—to rush away with him, even into outer darkness—rose to an almost irrepressible strength; and as she sat by her open window, watching the shadows stealing over the downs, her feet longed to be away—away over the hills. She could have almost started up and run off by herself. The poor child was shaken with passion. She would fling herself upon her bed, and clutch the pillow with hysterical excitement, and then burst into a silent fit of weeping till it seemed as if her very heart would break. She paced up and down her room till her head was giddy, then she sat by the window and watched for him. She had given out that she was unwell, that she had a head-

ache, and so on. She could not show herself; she must be alone—alone with him. For he was with her, even here in the solitude of her chamber. The great sun was blotted out from the sky—the sky itself had vanished—the down was a chaos; she saw nothing but Noel, felt nothing but his burning kiss, the fierce pressure of his arms. That long night through she never rested, never slept; she did not toss, she was calmer now. She lay thinking, thinking, thinking, and still it was Noel. Till towards the morning, when the dawn was breaking, her eyes closed involuntarily. Near noon she awoke refreshed and strengthened, but the first thought was Noel. But with the new strength and the rest there had returned to her some little dignity of mind, the waters of passion had subsided sufficiently to allow her reason to raise its faint cold voice. She must avoid him. It was her duty to do so, not only for herself, but for him. Yes, for his sake. That was the burden of her thought the whole day long. For his sake. Not for her own; but for his. This seemed to strengthen her, to cast aside

temptation. Strange that she should dwell upon his salvation, not her own. The truth was, though she would not have owned it to herself, that she did not wish to be saved. For her own sake was of no avail; she dared not trust to that—it was too feeble, too weak an inducement; therefore she reiterated 'For his sake—for his sake!' She must avoid him; she had helped to save his life, she must save his soul now. And all the while her fingers trembled, her knees would not support her weight in that firm unyielding manner of old; they shook, she could not walk with her old elasticity of step. Her hands were constantly ready to outstretch themselves, to save her from falling. She was obliged to hold to the banisters as she descended the broad staircase with its easy descent. How should she avoid him? She could go on a visit, and so escape the torture of his daily call. She almost made up her mind to do this; but somehow there seemed so many obstacles. First, she had been at home so long, there was a natural reluctance to leave the old place. She had never made many female friends.

She had aunts, but they had shaken their heads at the education Pierce gave his child, and whenever she met them, lectured her on her ridings, her walks, her scampering excursions, her fishing, and her boating. They were detestable creatures, and since—no matter; no, she *could* not go to them.

But Georgiana was in London. Georgiana would be glad to see her. But she was too unwell for so long a journey—the weather was so warm—there had been such dreadful railway accidents, and Georgie herself was so good and grand, it would make her feel so small. These were the reasons why she did not leave Bourne Manor.

Heloise, unhappy girl, was hard at work deceiving herself. She clung to the spot; her heart was there, and her body could not move away from it. She must avoid him at home. How to do that? At least she could plead that she was indisposed, and so escape walking out with him alone. She must see him in the house; that could not be avoided, without absolute rudeness. Was there not danger in that—danger to him? No. Noel would

see that she was right—he would even come in time to bless her for her firmness. And herself? What danger could there be in the house? She could never, never *start* with him from the house, with Pierce within call; her cheeks burnt at the thought. No, she was quite safe here. It was better too to face the temptation—to conquer it—to get accustomed to it, till it had no power. And then Noel; she must gently persuade him out of his infatuation. So for a whole week Heloise remained within doors; steadfastly refusing Noel's hints, his praise of the weather, his suggestions of pleasant excursions, resisting even when unconscious Pierce begged her to go out. She plumed herself on this strength of resolution. After all she was not so very weak, not so very guilty. It was fortunate that she had not gone for a visit. Then perhaps she should have been always thinking of him, always longing to be back home and near him; as it was, she saw him daily, and no harm ensued. Her heart grew calmer, more peaceful. There was no danger; she was not afraid now. Perhaps in time, when Noel was

cured of his frenzied excitement, when she had persuaded him out of his infatuation, when she had saved him from himself, perhaps then the old happy times might come back, when they should again wander over 'forest, field, and fell,' seeking for flowers for Pierce's garden, discoursing of nature, when this fever-fit should be past, and all again be placid. Heloise dreamed of joyful times to come. She was very gentle now; singularly affectionate to Pierce—gentle exceedingly to the servants, thoughtful of their little wants, of their relations, their private cares. She was loving to all around her, except Noel; at least the *except* was her own idea. She remembered her poor pensioners—unthought of now for many a day—and began to visit them again, carrying with her food and wine and money, and a glow of sunlight into the wretched cottages of the poor. But always alone—always when she knew Noel was absent, and when he would not overtake her.

Noel was mad at this time—literally and genuinely mad. His face was smooth, his demeanour calm and gentlemanly, his voice

had its usual tone. But the man's heart was boiling with wildest passion, with fierce and frenzied rage, working and seething like the veritable witches' caldron. Mingling with the savageness of his love there came a growing feeling against Heloise—against her in this way. She had led him on—encouraged him—allowed him to proceed; then, just at the last moment, when her own safety was concerned, she turned away from him. O, yes, her own safety—her own good name; these women were so utterly selfish, they could love deeply, passionately, up to *that*, but no further; pah! he hated them. Had she really loved him, had those kisses she had showered upon him been real, she would have clung to him—begged him to take her. She was not a coquette—she was worse. She loved artificially—she could put a bound and fence to her passion; rail it off, as one might a garden. He despised her; he sneered at her; he hated her. He used this very contempt, this very hatred and rage, as a justification of his own wicked and evil thoughts. Verily at that time, if he could have caught hold of her alone, he

would have attempted to drag her away by sheer physical force. And he did watch for such an opportunity, but Heloise remained indoors. Finding that he could not tempt her forth, he tried fraud: he gave out that he should be away for a day; then he mounted his horse, and hovered about within easy reach of the house, feeling sure that Heloise would come out; and he determined to snatch her up in the saddle before him, and to ride away with her. He even went so far as to telegraph to his yacht to anchor in the road at the mouth of the river—the river which ran at the end of Pierce's garden. The man was literally mad. But Heloise did not venture forth all that week. Then he raged against her inwardly still more, though outwardly polite and attentive when they met—always in Pierce's presence—but with a demon in his heart, boiling to wreak his vengeance on the fragile creature whom his hand could crush as it might a delicate rose. By the end of the week his frenzy had so far subsided that he gave up the idea of carrying her off by force. He would resort to fraud—to

the same arts with which she had decoyed him onward; he would deceive her with a show of penitence, with a semblance of regret for his wicked attempt; then when she was once in his hands, he would lead her on—he would fascinate her as he had done in that shady nook, till she reposed in his embraces unresistingly. It was about this time that Heloise recommenced visiting her poor pensioners, and Noel at once seized the opportunity.

One afternoon Pierce suggested that she should visit Betsy Farmer, the bedridden old lady at Wick. 'At Wick?' said Noel; 'that is down the river, is it not? Will you allow me to row you down?' He said this in a deprecating tone of voice. Heloise, little versed in the arts of deception, strong too in her new-found armour against temptation, readily accepted the proposal; and in an hour they were slowly proceeding down the stream.

There was silence for a while. Noel's heart was leaping wildly with eager hopes and fierce anticipation of success. Heloise let her hand hang over the gunwale in the clear and warm water, and averted her gaze, full of a

pleasure she dared not own to herself. Thus it was that when the river broadened to a pool—shallow but not muddy—and Noel left the mid-stream and began to carefully steer his frail craft towards an island, she made no remark and no resistance. Perhaps it was the dreamy warmth of the day—perhaps it was the sultry sun, the closeness of the air—made her slumberous and idle ; but she said not a word, nor looked where they were going. She remembered how she herself had taught Noel the channel to this very island—the channel she had learnt long, long ago in childhood, winding in and out—now round a sandbank, now by the thick weeds—over the shallow bottom, clearly visible with its pebbles and its white nodules of chalk—winding in and out, till they left the mid-stream far away, and the prow of the skiff shot into a natural arbour formed by the tall green osiers, and grounded in the sand. Then Noel laid his oars aside, and turned to her, but was silent still. She was drooping as it were over the side of the boat, toying with a water-lily, her face mirrored in the dark water—

dark here because in shade. Tall reeds just beginning to push forth their feathery flowers hung over her, and the great bulrush was within reach. The green osiers, thick and impenetrable, lined them round on three sides, and almost shut them in completely, save for one narrow opening, through which every now and then a cool air blew intermittently from the river. They sat so still, so silent, that the fish disturbed by the boat returned to their feeding grounds, where the air blew the insects off the osiers and the reeds into the water, and slight splashes, and a circle of tiny wavelets now and then, showed where the trout or perch had risen to the fly. The timid moorhen stole out from the osiers, and swam to and fro in the mouth of this green cove, pecking at the weeds floating on the surface of the water. Overhead the swallows flitted through the clear blue sky, and the monotonous cry of the coot sounded over the river.

'Heloise.'

She turned and looked at him, the quick blush rising into her cheek. He took her

hand—he came nearer, he pressed it, he kissed it; still she said nothing. He was about to take her in his arms, but she held him away, and said in a faint voice,

'Noel, this must not be.'

'I do not wish to—to—' said Noel. 'I wished to apologise for my indiscretion the other day. Will you forgive me? You know that I must love you. I cannot help it, Heloise. Am I to blame for what I cannot resist? Do *you* blame me?'

'I do not blame you, *dear*' (the word escaped her unawares); 'but it must not be again.' Then with sudden earnestness, 'Noel, let us be friends—let us be companions—let us wander about as we used. Bury this old dream, dear, cast it away—it is unworthy of *you*. I will never remember it if you will not. O, do let us be friends again.'

And she took his hand in both of hers, and actually deceived herself that she was persuading him out of his infatuation. They were playing the same old comedy—they were playing before themselves; wearing

masks to deceive themselves, to prevent the recognition of the true self.

'I will, indeed,' said Noel, returning the pressure of her hands, and laying his other hand on her arm. 'I will indeed, dear. Forgive me, darling; but I must tell you how I love you; then you will do me justice; you will see how hard it has been for me; you will pity me, Heloise.'

And he came near her, and poured out what I cannot write—a low murmur of wildest passion and love and entreaty, till she sighed, and their lips met, and in a moment friendship and companionship was thrown to the winds, and they were fast in each other's embraces. She heard the loud thump of his heart as her face pressed against his breast, nestling there. She looked up, half smiling, and placed her hand there, and asked him why it beat so loudly; and of course he told her it was for her, and for her only. And she kissed the spot, and put her ear there, and listened, and believed, till the tears came into her eyes. Then he kissed them away, and held her close, and murmured more wild

love, and played with her arm, and kissed and fondled it, and placed it over his shoulder and round his neck. Then he whispered words again, and drew a picture of the walking for ever hand in hand through sunshine and over flowers, and gradually brought it round to a foreign country, and drew descriptions of the beauty and the wondrous marvels he had seen; and O, if she had been with him! till she sighed, and clung to him, and deceived by this— But wait. It may be that if Noel had had patience, and gone on thus long enough—if he could have repeated the game day after day for a month, and gradually accustomed her mind to the idea, till it failed to alarm her and grew familiar—perhaps he might have won easily. But women cannot be taken all at once; they must be prepared, educated up to the desired point, by slow and imperceptible degrees, but in the end they most eagerly desire the very thing they dreaded a few weeks previously. Noel was too impatient, and deceived by those warm arms clinging to him as he painted his picture, he ventured too far, and once more

made the fatal proposal that she should fly with him. In an instant Heloise had started away.

'Take me home, *sir!*' she said, trembling and turning pale. 'Take me home—this instant—this instant!'

And she snatched at one of the oars; and before he could prevent her, sent the boat out of the cove into the pool; and Noel glancing round saw a punt with a man fishing, and cursed that punt bitterly in his own heart. Then his wrath rose against her, and he reproached her and raged against her, and called her evil and hard names, and swore, and declared that he hated her—hated her—hated her.

And she, trembling still, cried faintly to him to take her home; trembling till the frail craft fairly shook. He seized the sculls, and forced the boat bumping and swaying and scraping over sandbank and stones and weeds, till they swept into the mid-stream. Then she put forth her hands, and pointed wildly at the shore; and he still cursing and raving ran the boat against it, and she sprang out, and

fled away across the fields, soon out of sight behind the hedges. Then Noel burst into a fit of discordant laughter.

'What shall I do with this?' said he aloud, looking at the two bottles of port Heloise was taking to the cripple. 'Ha, ha, ha!' And his wild laugh sounded over the waters.

He gave way with the oars, and drove out into the pool till he came to the punt, in which some man, baked and scorched with the sun, was fishing, and asked him if he would help drink them. The man, nothing loth, joyfully assented, and they drank together; and Noel continually laughed and made jokes. The fisherman thought it odd; but the wine was good, and he was exceedingly thirsty, and so he said nothing. When they had finished it, Noel flung the bottles at a huge stone that stood up out of the water, and rowed back to the boat-house at Bourne Manor. There he secured the boat, and went away to Knoyle-lands, and so up to London in the evening by the express, cursing Heloise in his heart, and mad with passion, rage, and disappointment, swearing that he would see her no more.

CHAPTER XVIII.

In a long-forgotten number of a magazine there once appeared a piece of the truest poetry with the saddest meaning that was ever written by human pen. It had an unattractive title; it was barely noticed in the reviews; it fell into total oblivion. How utterly fatuous it is to believe that a thing survives if it is but worth survival! Look at those famous classics, for instance. Here, it is true, are Plato and Xenophon, Thucydides and Lucretius; but are there not also Martial, Catullus, and others, the only beauty of whose books is their learned lewdness? The fittest does not survive; the noblest and the best too often pass away utterly unnoticed, while some trashy gaudy thing works itself into the very heart of the public, and lives there for years.

This poem told how a little goose-girl, a

child who minded the geese on the common, 'went singing' along the road one fine day in the year 1999, and came to a school, where the scholars—girls and boys of her own age—instead of playing in their dinner time, were hard at work studying—reading, reading, reading; poring, poring, poring—till the bell rang, and they returned to their forms, and pored and read in chorus as they had previously done individually.

The school-children and their teachers were horribly scandalised with the little goose-girl, who came along in the middle of the broad day idly singing, slowly sauntering in the sunlight; and they came round her and wanted her to learn too, to read and write and pore, as they did, from morn till night, through spring and summer, autumn and winter, till the face grew pallid and the shoulders stooped. 'I do not know what you mean,' said the little goose-girl; 'I live in the sunshine all the day long, and I watch the clouds in the sky, and listen to the birds singing, and I sing too always.' 'But this is very wrong,' the teachers and the school-children argue, 'for we must all

work, work, work, and learn, learn, learn, as hard and as long as ever we can; still adding two to three, and three to five, for *everybody* does;' *everybody* through the whole of the land in that year 1999 was learning and reading and studying hard, hard, till their brows ached, and their lives were shortened; still they must learn. To do otherwise were wrong and evil. 'I do not know,' said the little goose-girl.

'The mills of the gods grind slowly,
But they grind exceeding small.'

She will have none of their teaching; she cannot understand what it matters, whether this row of figures is added to that to-day or to-morrow; to her, life is not in books nor figures, it is not spent on a slate. Life is in the sun and the sky, in the wind and in the wood. So she will away, and have none of their teaching.

'The mills of the gods grind slowly,
But they grind exceeding small;
I will sit on the hills, by the gods' mills,
And watch the slow atoms fall.'

So she goes away into the sunshine, and leaves the children and the teachers still teaching, teaching, learning, poring, reading,

wearing out their very eyes. There is a deep and sad significance in this poem of the little goose-girl. I cannot but think that she was wiser far than the teachers and the school-children. We have become so imbued with pen, ink, and paper—we have grown up among figures and calculations, among learning and teaching, till it has become to us a second nature, and we exclaim at the bare idea of the little goose-girl, 'What shocking ignorance!' But think a while, in what does this knowledge consist—this arithmetic for instance, these rows upon rows of figures, which the little goose-girl saw them adding up with such feverish anxiety. This arithmetic—add up ten thousand times ten thousand slates and copy-books, work up forty million sums absolutely correctly; and how, in what way, have you really benefited—have you *lived* the time that you were thus employed? Would not the sunshine, and the air, and the forest, and the clouds in the sky have benefited you more, had you spent the time among them, learning, as the little goose-girl did, that the 'mills of the gods grind slowly,' than all this purely

artificial labour? Ay, but it must be done; we cannot live without it; we *must* learn and teach, these figures are essential to our modern life. Granted that that is true, and is not this the saddest part of it all, that we cannot all dwell in the sun and the sky—that these artificial labours, these miserable, petty, *un*real works should be necessary to our existence? I once knew a gentleman, a man of business, who declared and firmly believed that figures were everything; you could do nothing without them, and everything resolved itself into figures; and he meant account-book figures—ledger and day-book marks, literally 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and so on. Poor fellow, what an utter blindness must have possessed him! he forgot that man had a *soul*. Now the little goose-girl was nearer the God of the soul than all the teachers and school-children ever would be. All these vast towns of our day, these millions upon millions of houses, full of millions upon millions of people—these whole provinces built over—what are they but great schoolhouses, in which the men of money, the capitalists (I mean no reflection upon them) are as the

teachers in the school, and the workers as the scholars—all of these capitalists and workers hard at it, poring, poring, poring for ever; with their eyes shut to the sun and the sky, and for ever cast upon the wretched earth, with its mud and moisture, its coal-dust and smoke. All arithmetic and no God! The little goose-girl upon her common, with the cackle of her geese coming down upon the breeze, with the light of heaven upon her open brow, with the song on her lips, was happier and far nearer the ultimate search of all men than the whole of these.

But we cannot all be little goose-girls, and there is the sadness of it. We bless the railways, and the manufactories, and the coal, and the iron, and the cotton; and yet sometimes are we not tempted to think that the men who invented these things cursed their race more than the fatal crime of Adam did? for they have caused the enormous population of our time. There are millions upon millions of human beings, each with a brain, a heart, and a soul; and yet not one in ten thousand has ever the chance to commune with Nature,

to walk reverently in the temples she has built, and to know the mysterious awe which falls upon the mind in the near presence of its Creator. I know not what will be the end of it; all I know is that nothing but evil and disaster can ultimately result from it.

And watch society, the faithful reflex of the motions of the great heart of the people. Society, that thinks it leads and lays down a model for the people to copy, and which is in reality but the elastic representative, the outcome of the populace, or rather the logos of the multitudes. What does it do? Is it not ever restless, dissatisfied? See how it runs to any new diversion. Now it is canoe travelling, now it is Alpine climbing, then polo, pigeon shooting, bicycling, croquet, spiritualism (this the saddest of all); weary of all things, dissatisfied with all; artificially born, artificially bred, reared artificially, fed with artificial mental pabulum, till it is incapable of understanding the natural, till it sees nothing in the sun and the sky but space and a candle, and believes that the Whole Duty of Man is—Arithmetic. It is very miserable to think of.

And after all it is no one's fault; we did not make the circumstances, we cannot alter them.

Neville had lived almost the life of the little goose-girl; he had dwelt in the sunlight, lain upon the grass, *inhaled* through every pore of his body the influence of Nature. He had been happy in this. He had believed that with Georgiana he should be happier still. Somehow with familiarity that happiness slowly departed, and he could not return to the old, old ways. Then came the whirl and excitement of a novel life—the life of the upper ten thousand. He flattered himself at first with the reflection that after all, as a student of the earth, he should not confine himself to Nature alone, to trees and woods and sunshine. He ought to study Man. He studied man at Ascot, at Hurlingham, at Kensington, by the Thames. He grew more and more restless. While he had lived with Nature, though he could not penetrate behind her veil, and though he could discover nothing new, no sensation, yet he had been peaceful, wanting nothing. Now he never rested. And

he found it the fashion not to rest; to be ever seeking new sensations—to rush hither and thither. He found it to be ultra-fashionable to do worse than this; to languidly remain in one place, and be ever bored, convinced that nothing that may possibly turn up, however well it may promise at first, can result in anything but a bore at last. But being a man who still retained his habit of thought, though people told him thinking was a bore, and acted on their precept, he turned to those about him, and began to inquire if there were no remedy for all this vacuity.

'Remedy!' said the Duke. 'By Jove! the only remedy is—to get *drunk*. That's the long and the short of it. Fearfully immoral, degrading, and all the rest of it, of course; quite agree myself with all that. But look here, you may safely bet that the experience of all the world goes farther than our mere maxims. And just see what the world does. The world, my dear fellow, the world *takes its drops*. And opium-smoking is gaining ground in London—fact; I've been and seen it out of curiosity. The fellows look

in a dream; they are happy, they forget everything. Depend upon it, the only remedy is to get drunk.'

'But the devil of it ith,' said the Hon. Mr. Vane, lisping, 'I can't get intoxicated; I mean —I—I get sthoopid, you know, but I alwayth *know* I'm dwunk.'

'Effect of education,' said the Duke sententiously.

'I think,' said 'Billy' (heir to a viscount), 'that the very best thing we could do would be to go to Arizona and hunt the Indians. Murder would be a new sensation; you read in the novels and see that blood gives a peculiar feeling. It would be rare fun potting the bronzed beggars.'

'I think,' said Neville, speaking in a dreamy, far-off manner, 'the very best thing for us all would be the discovery of a new continent; not one like America, where one can get across it and find the sea the other side, but an illimitable continent—a forest, a plain, mountains, rivers, lakes without end—stretching away for ever; a continent into which men might wander day by day for ever

and for ever, beginning in youth and going on till death came, straight away as the crow flies, and never reach the other side; a continent which hundreds of generations of men might take up each other's tracks—as the one dropped the other taking up the journey—and yet never *arrive*, but be always travelling onwards, onwards, onwards. Then we should have a resource—somewhere to hide ourselves; *now* the world is so small.'

'There's something in what you say,' said the Duke; 'not that I can bring my mind to believe that the world is so small as our physicists define it. One's natural sense goes against it; one cannot understand the possibility of travelling round it in a few months. It is quite true that all the calculations come right; but then they say that so they will if you treat the earth as a plane. I would rather it was proved a plane, for then it may be of greater extent, and there may be, as you suggest, more continents yet to be found.'

'"Where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest,"' said the embryo viscount.

'"If that's the true definition of heaven," said Dean Swift, "then it is clear there are no women there. For—who is the woman?" However, I'll lay you odds on Merry's lot,' said the Duke; and they were soon busy with their note-books and pencils.

'They tell us,' said the Duchess to Georgiana that very afternoon, 'that the ladies are the weaker vessels; but, my dear, look how wretched they are with all their hunting and shooting and betting, and all their barbarian "sports." See how they yawn and talk about *ennui*. My dear, they have not got the resource of the bonnet; there we are immeasurably superior.'

But Georgiana did not smile at the jest so merrily as had been her wont of late. In truth, the great doctrine, the grand law of nature—reaction—had begun to set in in her case also. This whirl, this excitement without emotion, this constant seeking for something new and its concomitant *ennui*, had had its effect upon her also. She too grew weary, restless, dissatisfied. Had she been brought up in the millinery school, in the fashionable

hopes and fears, in the petty circle of ideas that are crammed into the heads of the girls of the period, no doubt The Bonnet would have satisfied her too; and she would have gone on to the end of her life studying the grand philosophy of trimming, of flowers and feathers, and occupied with the vital question as to whether heavy masses of fruit were or were not *distingué*. But Georgiana had been accustomed for years to think, and now that the novelty of their new life was wearing off, the old habit of reflection returned to her. She asked herself if she was happy. A sigh was the reply. She had gone a good way through nature, she had walked in the forest and the field, though, to tell truth, it was a superficial *detail* study; and now she had studied, *i.e.* lived among—for true study means to live among—the ways of men and women, the drift of the Gulf Stream of the world.

Many hundreds of years ago certain valorous men of might, especially one Pantagruel, much vexed in a deep and knotty question, stepped on shipboard, and sailing over ocean's waste, sought in unknown lands the famous

temple and the truthful oracle of the Bottle. They found this wondrous Bottle at last, and all the answer the oracle made to their inquiries was 'Buc, buc,' or as we say 'Good, good,' when we imitate the noise of port-wine as we pour it out of the bottle into the decanter. That was all—Buc, buc; at least so sayeth that famous chronicler Rabelais.

Now Georgiana had travelled the perilous road, the strait and narrow way, only open to the few and the select, which leadeth to this deep and wondrous oracle of The Bonnet; and the answer of the high priestess was what? that strings were not so becoming as no strings. There it ended. She was weary, restless, dissatisfied, like the rest of them. She drew away from them that evening; the jest of her grace had brought it to a point. She wished to be alone, and to think. From the window of her room she could see over the expanse of the Park, and the gathering gloom hid away the houses at the horizon, and there was nothing but a heavy, black, and thunderous cloud in the west; and on the edge of that black and inky sullen vapour there glittered

a glorious planet, a ball of white light—Venus. She was weary, dissatisfied. This *ennui*, this impossibility of finding satisfaction, led to a still greater mischief—to doubt. After all, was she—with all her high ideas of her mission, of the equality of women, their rights and natural prerogative—any better, wiser, nearer the truth and satisfaction than the rest of these butterflies, who never stayed to think, but took things as they found them?

Better far that we should believe, even if our faith be in a false idol. The devil has no instrument in all his arsenal that will blunt the edge of our better nature like a want of faith. When Chatterton, the boy-poet, lost faith in himself, he killed himself. The Book does not say so in distinct words, but does it not hint at it? When the greatest Prophet of them all struggled forty days in the wilderness, was not a doubt of His own mission—did the devil leave *that* temptation untried?

No better than the feeble, weak, frivolous creatures she had despised; no nearer the great goal, humanly still as low, herself even incapable of improvement; no better than

those who had taken things as they were. Her marriage, perfect in her theory, how had it turned out—better than theirs? She gazed at the noble and lovely planet on the edge of the deep black cloud, and thought of Neville and the first transports of their love. If that would return—if she could have had that always—if Neville—

But the great planet sank beneath the murky vapour, and the slow tears gathered in her eyes.

END OF VOL. II.

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